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# THE HERITAGE OF LANGDALE.

A Novel.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# THE HERITAGE OF LANGDALE.

## CHAPTER I.



DULL November afternoon was lowering over the wild open country and unsheltered coast-line of a southern shire nearly a hundred and sixty years ago. Long stretches of flat corn-fields, rich in the evidence of man's work and Nature's bounty, *now* beautify what were then wild marshy sands, with a melancholy growth of dull green bent towards the sea, and a sprinkling heather and wild flowers nearer terra-firma. At one point the land rose suddenly into a huge shapeless promontory—rugged, rocky, precipitous towards

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the sea ; but rounded and covered with thick green sward on the inner side.

Behind the shelter of this promontory lay the only bit of woodland for miles around. It nestled in a sort of semicircular valley, and crept round the base of the promontory to the west, where it grew, safe from nor' and sou' easters, with some luxuriance.

A small river took its course from the upper downs through this wood, widened as it approached the foot of the promontory, by the daily action of the tide. At low-water you might safely ride across the sandy embouchure to a wild lonely park, sparsely dotted with trees and sloping gently upwards to where it met the last straggling outposts of the wood, and was crowned by a grey, weatherbeaten, melancholy pile known locally as "The Priory," more accurately as Langdale Priory. It had been long in the hands of mere caretakers, for its last lord was on the losing side in the game of politics, and had been an exile for some years before his death ; while the man who, under the Government, administered the estate, John Langley (half-brother on the left-hand of the late lord), only paid rare and

unavoidable visits to the deserted residence. Just now unwonted smoke-wreathes rose from one or two of the chimneys, for the present master had, a couple of months before, brought thither a lady—a young lady—and her maid or female attendant, respecting whom the few neighbours had had much talk. She was, they said, Langley's ward, the late lord's daughter; and since her coming—although the Priory, instead of being, as now, within little over a couple of hours by train from the Metropolis, was at the end of a toilsome, not to say dangerous, journey—John Langley had visited it more than once, and was, with his son, at the opening of this tale again an inmate of its sombre walls.

In the middle of the valley above mentioned clustered the little rambling village which had, as usual in early times, gathered in the fostering neighbourhood of those “monks of old” to whom we owe so much, and bore the same name as the Priory, by the dependants of which it was originally peopled. Its present rude lounging population—half husbandmen, half smugglers—possessed more wealth and comfort than the inhabitants of similar

villages farther inland. They were a slow surly race, and constantly found time to saunter up the Head, as it was familiarly termed, with battered glasses under their arms, to look out in a seemingly purposeless manner.

This heavy November day then was glooming over the village green, on the edge of which stood the village inn—a low wide-spreading edifice of timber and rubble, with an irregular-tiled roof and narrow casements, a large and very dirty stableyard at one side, and in front a superb spreading oak, on a branch of which hung the sign, a “Crown and Sceptre.”

A convenient bench surrounded the tree, and on it sat two stout elderly men, one of whom wore a white apron; before them, holding a tray on which was a foaming jug of home-brewed and a couple of horns, stood a buxom, red-cheeked, black-eyed woman in a gay chintz dress drawn through the pocket-holes over a grey woollen petticoat, while her hair was hidden under a high-crowned white-linen cap, tied round with a red ribbon.

These were mine host and hostess, with



their neighbour, a farmer and owner of the village forge.

“Come, neighbour,” said Mistress Merrick, the hostess, “another horn of malt, ’tis as warm and thirsty a day as though it were June.”

“Ay, thirstier,” added her husband; “and how my young sir from the Priory could have sat nigh a full hour in the sanded parlour without so much as a cup of claret passes me.”

“How?” asked the blacksmith, with open-mouthed curiosity. “Hast thee th’ young Captain in there?” with a backward motion of his thumb.

“Ay, that we have,” cried the hostess, “and a rare fine gentleman he is, with his long fair hair all over powder, and such a sword by his side, not like old Pikeman’s cutlash, but long and thin like a big skewer. Eh! you could smell him right down the passage and oop the stair for sweet essences! and a right scornful gentleman—ain’t he, master?”

“Ay, he is,” returned Merrick, who was diligently filling his pipe. “No matter; I

remember his grandmother, and she would have done better to have married my uncle fair and honest than turn to what she did."

"I've heerd tell as how th' ould lord was nigh marrying of her," said the blacksmith.

"He was so; my uncle used to tell that the day was fixed and the ring ready, when Captain Rupert, the ould lord's sailor brother (him as quit the country years and years ago), came back from sea, raging against such madness," continued Merrick, after sundry breaks to draw his pipe; "and so, you see, the upshot was Master John Langley was born out o' wedlock, and his brother, our late noble lord, was his master."

"Master Langley and the young Captain have been nigh ten days at the Priory this turn," put in the hostess. "Ah! 'tis sad to see the old place deserted like, and the young lady, my lord's only daughter, shut up as if she were in prison."

"Hush, dame," said her husband. "What is that to us?"

"But what has brought the Captain here?" asked the blacksmith.

"Well, it's a queer business," said Merrick,

puffing as he spoke. "You know that schooner that has been cruising backard and forrard? Our folks call her the strange sail. The crew has been in and out our place a bit—honest open-handed chaps as you'd wish to see—talking an odd sort of lingo."

"What sort be they?" asked the blacksmith in a confidential tone.

"How should I know? They takes their liquor and pays for it; that's all I have to see to."

"Never mind, neighbour," interrupted Mistress Merrick. "The master may be close if he chooses; but I never see a craft like that with a grand lady aboard before."

"Hush, hush, wife!" said her husband cautiously.

"Pooh!" she returned. "I am not going to say more than will be the talk of the whole village. Late last night a grand lady came up with that funny man as gave master the rum you liked so much—a queer fellow with ringlets and earrings—my word, but she was a fine big woman! I never was so took aback as when Gusuppy, as they call him, said she wanted a room for the night. Any-

way, we got one ready, and she was no ways hard to please. Early this morning she had the master up (which I wonder she did not ask for me), and asked for a messenger immediate, to take a note oop to the Captain—to the Priory. Sure enough, oop he rode, over an hour and a half ago, at hot speed; and this his wedding-day! You know, he is to wed my lord's daughter this afternoon. Now 'tis past three, and there he sits, still waiting for the lady. She went out to take the air just before he came, and has never come back. There's a strange tale for you! She is a foreigner, the lady is, for little Gusuppy had to tell her every word we said in some queer tongue—he is gone with her." Mistress Merrick paused, out of breath.

The blacksmith listened, open-mouthed, while the host smoked in placid silence. The former now broke into exclamations, and slapping his huge brown hand energetically on his knee, cried:

"How d'ye know 'tis not the Chevalier himself?"

"Too big," returned the host sententiously;

“and, neighbour Hartley, you needn’t halloo as if you were hailing a boat.”

It may be here mentioned that this wild and lonely coast was a favourite landing-place for smugglers and Jacobite emissaries, and that the population was rather disaffected, though in a sleepy indifferent fashion, to the House of Hanover, now feeling a trifle more secure in its new place after the recent fruitless attempt of Mar in the Pretender’s cause.

Further conjecture was, however, stopped by the appearance, in the doorway of the inn, of an apparition unusual in that part of the country—viz., a fine gentleman. He was a tall slight man, dressed in a suit of fine blue cloth, laced with silver and decorated with silver filigree buttons. His own long fair hair, powdered and perfumed, lay upon his shoulders, crowned by a three-cornered hat, silver-laced and fringed with white feathers. His air and style was that of an exquisite of the period in a species of *demi-toilette*, if such an expression can be applied to male attire. Plain as was the suit, it was all in perfect keeping, from the silver-laced hat to the silver-edged cream-coloured gloves and silver-hilted

rapier, save that his high riding-boots were scarce in keeping with so much daintiness.

At sight of him, Merrick and the blacksmith rose, and the hostess laid her tray on the bench, the better to bob a curtsy. The gentleman held a large watch in his hand, on which he looked with an expression of cold displeasure in his handsome but contracted face ; then turning his pale-blue scornful eyes on the group opposite, said in slow discontented tones :

“ My horse at once—I can stay no longer. Tell the lady, if she returns, I shall be in London before the week is out. Now then my horse.”

“ Ay, sir. I’ll warrant I’ll hasten them,” returned Merrick, laying down his pipe, and walking towards the stables more speedily than could have been expected from his size, shouting, “ halloo !—Joe, Nick, the Captain’s horse ! Look alive, you lubbers ! his honour is waiting.” Calling out as he went, he disappeared into the yard, while Captain Langley stood reading a small note, looking at it on every side, as though not quite sure of the writing ; then tearing it into the smallest frag-

ments with sudden impatience, he scattered them in the heavy air, shouting as he did so :

“ What keeps those fellows with my horse? Am I to wait all day, you infernal lazy—” He stopped short, for Merrick reappeared in a state of great excitement. He held Joe—a youth in shirt-sleeves, with a shock head—by the collar, and with his disengaged hand seemed to pommel him severely, while the victim cried for mercy ; two other young men in rough attire followed, gesticulating and shouting.

“ You careless good-for-nothing scamps,” cried Merrick, letting go the first sufferer to seize another, “ to go for to lose his honour’s horse! How dare you take your eyes off him?”

“ What, what!” cried Captain Langley, springing forward. “ What’s this! — my horse lost?”

“ Ay, sir! Somehow these varmints have let him slip his halter, and he has run off. I’ll flog the life out of you—I’ll—” But the Captain here drew forth the riding-whip, which he held under his arm, and cut viciously right and left with a concentrated fury, very

different from the host's noisy demonstration.

"I have no time to punish the dogs now," exclaimed young Langley. "Come, saddle the best hack you have got in that beastly pigsty. By —— I'll make you pay for this day's work!"

"But, good sir, worshipful sir!" cried the hostess in visible trepidation, "we have ne'er a steed in the stable. Master's own bay mare is gone with his Reverence Parson Everard two hours ago. He was sore pressed to ride to Hythe, for Lord Dornton lies a-dying, and sent this morning at speed for the parson."

"How?" asked Langley, stepping back as if stunned. "The parson ridden away to Hythe! there is something wrong here! How did my horse get loose?" he continued in a high-pitched voice, his face again darkening; whereupon several loud voices in disjointed exclamations explained how "the halter was a bit rotten," and "his honour would have his beast tied in the yard, not put in the stable"—so, "when th' ould donkey brayed sudden like—"

"I suppose the brute has made his way



home," interrupted Captain Langley, "and I must follow on foot; but," with a deep imprecation, "you shall suffer for it."

"Shall I send to the Priory for a horse, your honour?"

"Send to ——" retorted the fine gentleman fiercely; "I will get there sooner on foot! And hark'ee, master, it's like enough there's some devilish scheme under all this—if so, look to yourself." So saying, and again striking the men nearest him with his riding-whip, he walked quickly away a few paces, then paused, and turning, requested in less angry tones to be informed if the first path to the left, after leaving the village, did not lead by a shorter way into the park.

"Ay, sir," answered Merrick, "after you pass the bridge. You couldn't cross the sands now, even on horseback; the tide is at the full."

"Ay, sir, about half a mile past my forge," said the blacksmith, "and I'll show—" But his further utterance was checked by a sudden backward step on the part of Merrick, which brought the full weight of that ponderous person on his tenderest toe.

While the blacksmith held his foot, uttering strong expressions of agony, Captain Harold Langley, of His Majesty's Foot Guards, marched off at a rapid pace—away—down the straggling High Street, where the children gazed wonderingly, and the dogs barked angrily at him. Once he stopped at the forge aforesaid, attracted by a rough stout pony tethered there while the smith shod an old grey mare. The owner of both, however, a rugged red-headed countryman, stupid, but not uncivil, wanted his cattle for himself, and could not be tempted to part with either, even for half an hour. So with many a muttered curse Harold Langley strode on. Now he glanced at his huge gold repeater; now at the fast darkening sky. It was past three o'clock, and the hour fixed for the ceremony of his marriage, if so unceremonious an affair could be so termed.

Not that Harold Langley was an impatient bridegroom. No; a wife, according to the fine gentleman theory, was "a mill-stone about the neck," even though buoyed by rank and wealth; but in the present instance the bride had neither: she was daughter of an

exiled despoiled malcontent, what was there to gain from such an alliance ? Harold could not fathom his father's motives for so peremptorily desiring the marriage. However, as it was only by consenting to it that he could get his debts paid, Captain Langley consented.

“ And she is such a strange little chit,” he thought ; “ heeds me no more than if I were a boor ! and yet she has had some cultivation too in the French capital, and does not seem altogether without wit ! Well, I will take the conceit out of her by-and-by.” Wherein the gallant guardsman reckoned without his host. The conceit was never taken out of a woman by a man she does not love. The power to humble and to crush is vested in the hands of him who holds her heart ; and he is seldom averse to exercise it.

While Harold Langley meditated and cursed the mischance which occasioned his long walk, his ill luck at play, his father, his bride elect, and the fair dame whose billet of that morning had led to his present position, he advanced at good speed, having left all signs of habitation behind. He now approached the little river before mentioned,

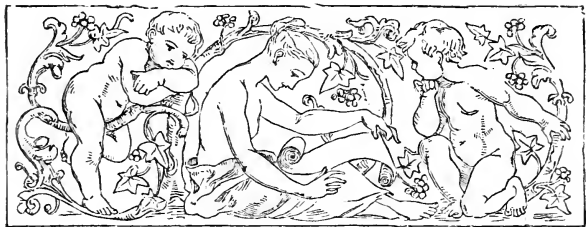
just where its steep shrubby banks opened to its embouchure.

“Directly she is my wife I will quit this infernal den, and never return,” was his mental resolution as he passed the first outlying clump of trees and underwood ; and as he emerged from its shelter up rose behind him, from the thicket, three figures—three strange-looking men in sailor garb, with gold earrings, and silk sashes of bright colours and foreign texture. The first—a short, powerful, broad-shouldered man—held a mass of drapery on his left arm ; with a silent stealthy tread he darted after the fine gentleman who had just passed, and with one cast of the voluminous cloak he carried enveloped him from head to foot.

In vain the victim struggled and strove to cry out. Thick entangling folds of cloth prevented either effort ; and the two other desperadoes were quickly at hand to aid their leader. Yet no very desperate motive seemed to prompt their action. Their bronzed hard countenances wore an expression of broad amusement, and they called to each other in a strange mixed dialect, in which even a few

English words were heard. "Your Excellency had better keep quiet," said the leader at last, as their prisoner made a sudden furious effort. "No harm is meant, so be quiet, Caramba! I did not think there was so much force in so slim a chap! Here, Nick, Antonio, take his feet; leave his head to me: I am equal to the two of you any day! Now bear a hand!—gently—all right! Excellency, don't take so out of yourself! Steady oh!"

Slowly the group approached the edge of the road where a footpath among the fern and brushwood led to the water's edge. Very carefully they lifted their burden over the rugged path, the leader loosening the cloak which wrapped their prisoner to admit air, informing him he might make as much noise as he liked, it would avail him nothing; and so, though moving slowly, they were soon out of sight—silence settling down once more over the peaceful beauty of the scene.



## CHAPTER II.

**L**ATER in the evening of the same day a middle-sized, middle-aged, square-set man, dressed with studious simplicity in a suit of black cloth relieved by cut-steel buttons, in black-silk stockings, with cut-steel shoe and knee buckles, the sole indication of costliness, his lace ruffles and cravatte, stood, his hands crossed behind him, in the recess of one of three windows which lighted a large room, known to the dwellers in Langdale Priory as the "little dining-room," to distinguish it from a wide banqueting hall on which it opened.

The outlook was not inspiring. The dull

daylight had almost faded, and the tide had receded sufficiently to leave bare in their unsightliness masses of wet seaweed, black and desolate-looking. The room itself looked desolate, an island of carpet broke the surface of polished oak near the fireplace, where the remains of a wood fire glowed sullenly. A heavy oaken table, a few high-backed chairs, and a large carved settle with a red cushion made up the furniture, in addition to a worm-eaten buffet at one side of the projecting fireplace.

The gentleman just described turned and paced the room, evidently in deep and uneasy thought. More than once he consulted his watch, frowning portentously as he did so. At length he approached the table and laid his hand upon a bell which stood there. As he did so, a puritanical-looking man, in sad-coloured garments and hair cropped sullenly straight across his brow, entered, and advancing deliberately to the table with a short bow, or rather nod of the head, said in a harsh voice :

“The clergyman has come.”

“Indeed ! whom have they got ?” asked the

other, who, it is scarce necessary to say, was Mr. John Langley.

“A gentleman from Thirlsmere, nigh eight miles off. He is somewhat shook with hard riding—shall I offer him a cup of ale?”

“Wine, my good Simon, wine,” returned Mr. Langley; “and, Simon, it is strange my son has not yet returned. Send instantly to the inn—recall him; some of our messengers have surely now come back, and the tide is low enough to cross the sands—half an hour will bring him here. Meantime I will go speak with my niece. She must have well-nigh exhausted her patience; it is full two hours past the time appointed. I must explain matters to her myself.”

Simon, Langley’s local factotum, withdrew, and his master, or employer, paused uneasily, his hand resting on the table. “That mad boy,” he thought, “to be drawn aside from so important an affair by a billet from some courtesan—some painted bit of villainy. Why will he not be guided by me! Why does he not see things as I do! With my brains and his manners what might we not accomplish. He is a fine lad, but a thoughtless.” The



father's grim square-jawed face relaxed as he thought of the son, round whom his all of human love was entwined.

As he thought, the door opened and two female figures entered, apparently to Mr. Langley's surprise. The elder was a tall gaunt woman, not old, but quite past youth, with a quantity of rough grey hair, over which was tied a cap of thick white lace, which yet produced little effect towards softening her rugged face, with its wide mouth and sharp grey eyes. Her dress of lavender silk was looped up over a petticoat of some dark stuff, and her sinewy spare arms were covered with black lace mittens to where the ruffles of her sleeves met them. On one of these strong arms leant a creature so widely different in aspect that, cold and unimpressible as he was, John Langley paused a moment in silence, struck by the contrast, as they approached.

A fair girl in earliest womanhood—a delicate highbred-looking woman, whose every movement suggested perfection of form. rather below middle height, her profuse nut-brown hair turned over a cushion in the regal fashion

of the times, adding to her height. Her somewhat pallid face, wide across the brow and tapering to the delicate chin, was lighted by a pair of blue eyes so fringed with long dark lashes that their colour was not easily discernible; her rosy mouth was perhaps larger than it ought to be for the strict rule of beauty, but so soft, so sensitively expressive, none could wish it altered; while a *nez retroussé* saved the face from over sweetness. She was clad in a long robe of white silk, the square-cut lace-edged corsage of which was ornamented with rosettes of violet and silver, and wrapping herself shiveringly in a large white-lace shawl or veil which partly covered her head. As she clung to her companion a fairer picture of a mother's or a lover's delicate darling could scarce be seen.

Not such, however, she seemed to the small, dark, restless eyes that gazed at her from under John Langley's heavy brows. The deer-like carriage of her head, the indescribable nobility of her air were insults to him; her whole bearing and aspect a silent protest on the side of that legitimacy which, according to his crooked theory, robbed him of his

rights. For was not he her father's eldest brother—the rightful heir of the Langdale Lands but for the leaving undone of a small ceremony, which his parents had omitted. This deadly sense of wrong, this poison of envy, had warped him from boyhood.

Not all the frank friendliness and active kindness of Reginald, the late lord, who had died in exile scarce a year previously, could soften his heart or relax the determination which gradually formed itself in his mind to possess himself of the heritage of Langdale. The open-hearted Lord Langdale had little dreamed of this; he looked on John as his mentor, his right hand. Nevertheless John's influence never kept him out of certain mischiefs—amongst them political plots, about which the good Baron cared little, though his unguarded participation in them led to his compulsory flight. Through all Lord Langdale believed in his brother, and to his care he bequeathed his only child, Maud, who now stopped opposite her uncle.

“My fair niece,” said he, taking her hand, and carefully softening his tones, “I grieve to tell you that your favourite parson, Everard,

cannot attend you to-day—you must e'en allow a stranger to tie the knot. An early patron and fast friend of the Rector lies on his deathbed, and sent craving the last consolations of religion from our good parson, who was compelled to obey the summons. Meantime my son, devoured with impatience, sent messengers in some directions, and rode forth himself to seek another clergyman, lest our plans should be defeated. The messenger has returned with a reverend gentleman, but my son, not knowing the country, has probably missed his way, for he has not yet returned."

"And Parson Everard cannot come! I am so sorry!" said the young lady, whose pleasant voice had a slightly foreign accent, while her eyes filled with tears. "He has ever been so kind to me! Why did you send for a stranger? A day sooner or a day later would make no difference."

"My dear young lady, to you perhaps; but you must make allowance for a lover's impatience."

To which Mistress Maud replied by a sweet saucy laugh, though her cheeks were pale and her lashes wet. "Harold a lover! Harold

impatient! Ah, good uncle, you are a droll." The young lady often made use of French expressions.

"Madam," returned Langley, frowning, "your mirth is unbecoming."

"*N'importe*," she rejoined. "Am I not going to fulfil my promise, and wed your son? Will you not fulfil yours, and take me from this weary dreary place? I daresay we shall do well enough as man and wife. My poor dear father loved me so much. Surely, when he is used to me, Harold will love me a little;" and turning her face quickly against the arm of her attendant, who had stood motionless while her young mistress spoke, she burst into tears. "There, uncle," she said, brokenly yet defiantly; "there! which like you best—my laughter or my weeping?"

"My young lady has been whimperish all day," said the gaunt woman in a rough *staccato* voice, "and faint like, which is but natural. A cup of mulled claret now."

Mr. Langley rang the bell which lay on the table with half-suppressed impatience; but while he rang it Simon re-entered, and announced that Captain Langley had arrived,

and that he with the reverend gentleman were even now waiting the bride in the chapel.

“It is well!” cried Langley, greatly relieved. “Come, dear niece, let me lead you to what will be the securing of your comfort for life.”

Maud, her bosom still heaving with sobs, and deadly pale, silently gave her hand.

“Stay close to me, Dorothy, dear Dorothy,” she whispered to her grim attendant, whereat that individual nodded a sharp emphatic nod, and the trio left the dining-room.

Crossing the large hall, they entered the deserted chapel, which opened from it. Here had been lavished a wealth of decorations in the old monkish days, now neglected and dilapidated. A paltry cloth covered the communion-table, where once was the high altar. The darkness of the chapel was rendered painfully visible by the pale lustre of a pair of huge wax-tapers placed upon the table; their light fell upon the clergyman in a crumpled surplice, and on the long fair hair and blue and silver suit of Captain Langley, who had placed himself on one of the stone recess seats to the left of the altar. He

rested his right elbow on his knee, and his head on his hand, as if lost in thought or absorbed in prayer, nor did he move till his bride came in a line with him, when he rose and took his place beside her. John Langley fell back a step, while Dorothy pressed close. Simon Evans, the caretaker, Mistress Margery, the housekeeper, old Nicholas, the general factotum, grouped themselves a few paces off; while the lower servants, a reduced retinue, crowded as near as they might. Then the clergyman, a young, healthy, rosy-faced man, opened the book, and began in a hasty monotonous manner to read the solemn touching service.

The bridegroom's responses were uttered in a deep undertone, which the echoes of the chapel blurred and rendered inarticulate; while the bride's were inaudible, even to her faithful Dorothy. At the passage where the ring is put on, the bridegroom drew from his own finger, and placed upon the bride's, one of a rich yellow colour and of extreme thickness. Dorothy at this point thought she perceived a certain failing about her young lady, as though she would have fallen. The same

idea seemed to suggest itself to the bridegroom, who passed his arm round her, and so held her up till the last word was spoken. Almost before the sound of the parson's voice ceased, the little head drooped forward, and Maud lay insensible against her new-made husband's breast.

"She is quite gone!" cried Dorothy.

"Way there!" said the bridegroom in his deep undertone, and raising her in his arms he carried the slight form swiftly through the onlookers, bending his head down to gaze into her face.

By the time Mr. Langley and Dorothy reached the dining-room, now almost in darkness, he was supporting his bride by one of the windows, which he had managed to throw open, and still bending with an air of tenderness over her.

"The dear lamb! is she coming to?" exclaimed Dorothy as she approached. Maud replied by languidly stretching out her arms to her attendant.

The bridegroom immediately resigned the fair pliant form to the waiting-woman, slipping something into her hand at the same time, and



muttering in her ear, "Guard your mistress well," drew away to make room for Mr. Langley, who now pressed forward with inquiries for his daughter-in-law.

With unwonted care he inspected her removal to her own room. Here Mistress Dorothy laid her on her bed, insisting on Mr. Langley and Dame Margery leaving the room, ordered perfect quiet, and took her station by the bedside.

A short space of complete silence ensued. Then, to Dorothy's great surprise, a whisper, low but distinct, came from her young lady's tremulous lips: "Dorothy, are we quite alone—quite safe?"

"Yes, my precious lamb!"

"Then, Dorothy," continued Maud, raising herself upon her elbow, "Harold has sent some one to take his place. I am not married to my uncle's son, but to some stranger."

"God bless you, my dear! You lie down and sleep. Do not excite yourself: you will find it all right when you wake."

"No, Dorothy, I am not wandering. I tell you," Maud spoke slowly and with solemnity, "I never saw yonder gentleman

before. I too thought it was Harold till he took my hand to put on this ring. Then something in his touch was so unlike Harold's; I looked up and saw a pair of brown eyes, and a look in them something like my father's, only sterner. My heart leaped, and then stood still. I scarce remember anything more until I was by the open window, and as you came up he whispered, 'Keep faith with me till I can claim you or release you.'"

"Dear heart!" cried the bewildered Dorothy, "what a tale is this. We know not what desperado may have murdered the Captain, and put on his clothes. Great powers! Why did you not cry aloud, or do something? It is a terrible business!"

"Dorothy," returned the young girl wearily, "I was so sick at heart to-day—so mad at my own weakness in consenting to wed Harold—so shamed at my own cowardice in fearing to break from that consent, that I rejoiced to feel the touch of another's hand; and then, when recovering, I feared to cry out, lest they would not let the gentleman get forth with life; for I have read that in John Langley's eyes I mortally fear. But, Dorothy, it is

terrible !” she added, shuddering. “ I am wedded to I know not who ! Any wretch might claim me, for I would scarce know yonder gentleman again. But see,” she continued, blushing and smiling, “ he has taken my breastknot,” pointing to a vacant place in the front of her dress, whence an ornament had been somewhat roughly unfastened. “ Nevertheless I am terrified,” resumed the young orphan. “ Stay by me ; never leave me, Dorothy, dear Dorothy ! my only friend.”

“ Ay will I, while I have life !” cried Dorothy, grasping her rough hair with both hands in her distress. “ Why am I standing here when the country ought to be scoured to find the poor young Captain or his remains ?” and disregarding her mistress’s entreaties not to be left alone, she rushed hastily out of the room.

Meantime Mr. Langley returned to the dining-room, intending to discuss with Harold the question of their journey to town and certain future arrangements.

He found that apartment looking considerably brighter than when he had left it. A good fire had been made up, and candles

were lighting on the table, which was spread for the evening meal ; but no Harold awaited him. He summoned the butler, as old Nicholas considered himself, and desired Captain Langley should be told he wished to speak with him.

“ The Captain has just ridden forth, sir.”

“ How ? Ridden forth ? Impossible !”

“ ’Tis true, your honour. Directly Madam Langley was carried to her chamber, the Captain went straight to the stables, mounted (for the men were all agog with the wedding, and had not unsaddled his horse), and rode away.”

“ Rode away !” echoed Langley, utterly confounded. Here was an amount of contumacious indifference for which he was wholly unprepared. What could it mean ? “ Send Simon Evans to me,” he said, after a few moments’ perplexed thought ; “ and let one of the stable-boys mount, and be ready to carry a message directly.”

Evans quickly obeyed his master’s summons, and confirmed the butler’s startling intelligence ; but Langley had hardly begun to utter his suspicion that the recreant bride-

groom had been again lured to the village inn, when the door was flung violently open, and Dorothy entered, her whole aspect showing utter dismay.

“Sir! sir! it was not the Captain! It was another man altogether! And you had better raise the country, for it is my belief your son has been ill-dealt by.”

“Woman, are you mad too?” said Langley, with fierce impatience.

“Hear me,” she returned, and then plunged into a short repetition of Maud’s story.

“Your mistress is raving—she wanders,” said Mr. Langley when she ceased. “A stranger pass himself on *me* as my own son! Impossible!”

“It is a strange tale,” observed Evans dryly. “Pity it is that Captain Langley took himself away.”

“Send to that accursed inn,” cried Langley, infuriated out of his usual puritanical precision. “He is lurking there no doubt; and send also towards Hythe, and all round the country. Dead or alive, I will have him back;” but Langley shivered slightly as he

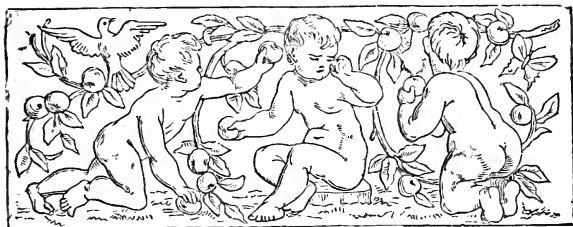
spoke. Sneer as he would at the improbability of Dorothy's tale, he could not resist the dim horror that began to gnaw his heart.

So the grooms mounted and rode in all directions, the young clergyman proving a valuable assistant; but the night passed over, and morning came, and noon also, but no Harold. It was a period of intense anguish to the grim self-controlled father; that any other than Harold had stood at the altar was an idea he could not entertain. Who but Harold had that long fair hair so peculiarly worn? And then the dress, the horse—both were Harold's. About this absurd whim of Maud's he did not trouble himself; but his son's unaccountable absence, *that* was a tangible terror. Now noon had again come round, the country for miles had been searched in vain, and a painful pause ensued.

Langley was debating with himself what was next to be done, his hopes dying out, his stern compressed nature refusing to succumb, when the clatter of horses' hoofs from the courtyard struck his ear, then a confused murmur of voices; next the door of Mr.

Langley's private room opened, and Harold himself burst in.

Harold alive, and seemingly well, but disordered by hard riding, his face dark with anger.



### CHAPTER III.



T the sight of his son, safe and sound, grief and anxiety gave way in John Langley's mind to supreme indignation.

“Harold,” he exclaimed in an angry voice, “what’s this? How dare you so insult your bride and me?”

“Give me some wine,” cried Harold, throwing aside his hat with a furious gesture. “I have been hoaxed and bedeviled, and ’fore Heaven I must have blood before I am satisfied! There is some hellish plot on foot! Where are the magistrates, and those wretched bumpkins who pretend to keep the peace, and let pirates prowl about at their pleasure?”



“Harold, I cannot understand you. How can you explain your absence at such a time?”

Whereupon, with many oaths and ejaculations, Harold recapitulated his misfortunes at the village, making no secret of the motive that lured him thither. About half-way back he was, he said, set on by a large party of ruffians, who muffled him in a cloak, carried him some way, and then, in a lonely rift of the rocks at the foot of the Head, compelled him (by a pistol held to his ear) to strip himself of his outer garments. He was then again muffled up, placed in a boat, rowed some distance, and hoisted up the side of a ship. “Here,” continued Harold, “I was set free in a small richly-furnished cabin, where they gave me an excellent supper and wonderfully fine wine, and treated me well. This morning they brought me my own clothes again, the coat strained and spoilt, as if some broad-shouldered brute had been forcing himself into it. I was blindfolded, put into a boat, and rowed a good way. Again I was lifted out, carried a few paces, and then ordered to stand still, on pain of having my

brains blown out. I waited patiently for what seemed a long time, when the dead silence was broken by the whinnying of a horse close by. I tore off the bandages, found myself quite alone, and the bay mare tethered beside me. Of course I mounted, and finding I was somewhere at the other side of the village, rode here as fast as I could. Now send for the parson, and let me make amends to the fair Maud for—”

An exclamation from his father interrupted him.

“Harold, she is married! Married to some one in your clothes, with your hair, Harold. There is more mischief under this than at first sight seems. But, come now, has not this been some drunken dream? Confess you have been drinking deep.”

“Nonsense, sir!” returned the young man; “I might put the same question to you. How is it that any one could persuade you into believing him your son?”

“Listen to me,” returned Langley, and proceeded to recount the occurrences of the previous evening; whereupon Harold’s fury subsided into astonishment.

“There must be some infernal plot brewing somewhere ! What’s your idea of the matter, sir ?”

Mr. Langley did not answer immediately. He sat down beside his open bureau, and, placing his elbows on it, leaned his face upon his hands. Harold, looking to his father to help him out of a difficulty, kept a respectful silence—respectful only under such circumstances. At last Mr. Langley raised his head, looking dark and stern, and speaking as if to himself, observed :

“The existence of that pardon is known to more than I thought.”

“How ? What pardon ?” asked the son, drawing a chair opposite and gazing eagerly at his parent.

Whereupon, with many injunctions to keep the explanation strictly secret, Langley proceeded :

“When Lord Langdale had been nearly nine years banished, many friends of his—for he had them on both sides—exerted themselves to procure a remission of his disabilities, especially St. John, who never quite broke with St. Germain ; and it was this leniency

which permitted me so long to manage this estate, much of the revenues of which went both to friends and foes ; comparatively little falling to my share, I can assure you. However, it was generally believed that the late queen died without granting the pardon sought for by Lord Langdale's friends. Now I believe she did—Langdale so informed me ; if so, it must have been one of her last acts. But the document has never appeared. Lord Langdale died somewhat suddenly, St. John is in his turn an exile, and the only trace of the pardon that has come to my knowledge was through a rascally dismissed clerk from Harley's office—a drunken fellow, who wanted to extract money from me, declaring he had possessed himself of the missing pardon. I cannot think how this scoundrel got hold of it, *if* he had ; for on my refusing to give him attention till I saw the document and held it in my hand, he promised to bring it next day. He came in the evening certes, but in sorry plight, with a broken head and quite beside himself. Some one, he said, had knocked him down senseless, and robbed him of the precious parchment. Nay, I believe

him. No man could have merely *acted* such part. Moreover his head was sore hurt. Since then I have striven in many ways to gain intelligence, but have never succeeded in obtaining the smallest clue."

"This is a strange history," said Harold, as his father paused. "Why did you never tell me these particulars before?"

"Because, young sir, you are not over fond of listening to my words, nor of keeping your own counsel from your boon companions. How was it you were so weak, so senseless, as to be lured by a billet from some courtesan to—"

"Pardon me, sir," interrupted Harold, with his finest air; "it was a lady of fashion and reputation who so far honoured me with her confidence. I had already made some way in her good graces when your inexorable cruelty carried me into these rude regions; and you can imagine my delight at receiving a mysterious billet, purporting to be from the divine creature."

"The divine creature is, I fancy, not sparing of her favours, or your plotters could not have known how to bait their trap so cun-

ningly," returned Langley sneeringly. "She was well worth risking the loss of this goodly heritage."

"Then why, sir, not confide this tale to me before? I should have been more circumspect."

"I doubt it, Harold. Moreover it was not necessary. By this marriage the lands of Langdale were secured to you if the pardon is ever discovered. They would be yours in right of your wife, by the fiction of the law, as well as the reality of primogeniture which ought to be *mine*. You would never know the galling sense of wrong and humiliation as I have done—to feel my younger brother lord it over me; to be compelled to lick the hand that flung me obligations."

Langley paused, suddenly checking the bitter words that rose to his lips. It was seldom so much of the inner fire showed itself above the calm of his exterior; and Harold felt proportionally impressed.

"Why," said he, elevating his arched eyebrows, "I thought the Baron and yourself were dear friends. Have I not seen his letters? He must have been a most unso-

phisticated rustic! How was it he loved you so much?"

"I was useful to him. I have ever found it wiser to loosen the stones in a wall than to run my head against it! Then he always prated of our being the last of a long line. But Lord Langdale was a fool! He stuck to a failing cause, and was obliged to fly. Died and left his only child to my care. Ay! and she is of the same sort—brimful of a careless pride that flings favours as you do bones to curs. I can read the haughty curve of her soft-looking lips aright. Distrust of us lurks in her heart. She must feel she is a beggar, dependent on my bounty. She ought to be at my feet in gratitude for the marriage I have planned for her; and yet she bears herself like a queen! Why, Harold, she *knew* you were not the man to whom she vowed herself yesterday; and yet she let him escape. My son, *she* shall not escape us!"

"This is a pleasant view of one's future wife!" said Harold, shrugging his shoulders. "Think you she knew the fellow?"

Langley thought a moment. "No!" he said. "The dismay of that unmanageable

hag Dorothy proved that. She and Madam Maud are one. No !”

“ At any rate, sir, we are checkmated for the present.”

“ Not so. This idle talk is breath wasted. Who represented you yesterday ? that is the question. I believe him to be some adventurer who has got hold of the pardon and wishes to entitle himself to this noble estate. But no ! There is many a barrier to be surmounted yet, Sir Stranger ! Listen, Harold. We will make Parson Everard talk to Maud and persuade her to go through the ceremony with you. He is well aware how advantageous the marriage would be to his old friend’s daughter—and therefore on our side. Then we will carry her away to London. I dare not trust her here, even were I able to remain on guard myself—so bold, so dexterous a villain would carry her off under our very eyes ! Away, Harold ! dress yourself in your best attire. Go ! play the heart-broken lover—ply her well with flattery. Come, Harold—she is fair—a dainty piece of female flesh !”

“ True, sir !” said the fine gentleman, whose



equanimity was somewhat restored ; “ but so refrigerated a morsel that it would require a real burning flame to warm her. And this I have been accustomed to see offered on my own shrine ! Besides, a helpless kidnapped lover is a somewhat ridiculous object. However,” he continued, with an oath, “ I’ll do my best to frustrate the scoundrel that entrapped me. I marvel who he was ? some roystering desperado. But I must own I was not badly treated ; and—” raising his arm till the sleeve touched his nose—“ the fellow has a fair taste in perfumes !”

Another day only added deeper shades to the mystery surrounding these strange occurrences. The parson made his appearance in a state of much bewilderment. On reaching the principal inn at Hythe, he found that, so far from lying there on his deathbed, my Lord Dornton had not visited the town for more than six months, and was then supposed to be in the North.

The worthy clergyman and his steed were too weary to return the same night ; and when he did, it was but to add his vague

conjecture to Langley's, only, in his ignorance of Langley's secret, they were still wider of the mark. It was, he thought, a wild hoax on the part of some of Harold's boon companions ; and he earnestly, if a little prosily, entreated that young man to reform—to quit his wild courses now that he was about to enter into the holy estate of matrimony—to live “cleanly and like a gentleman,” &c. &c.—advice for which Mr. Langley thanked him with laborious courtesy. But Langley's courtesy became more difficult to maintain when he found that the parson backed up Maud in her decided refusal to go through the ceremony of marriage once more.

“It would be making a mock of a sacred rite,” he said ; “take open and decided steps to have the marriage already celebrated declared null and void, then your way will be clear ; but do not so unjustly by your ward as to leave her a prey to dangerous claims.”

Enraged as Langley was by these scruples, the feelings roused by them were nothing compared to the fury and hatred engendered by Maud's conduct. She had been—or, as Langley thought, pretended to be—unwell for

several days, and unable to see any one save Dorothy. When at last she did appear, with pale cheeks, and heavy eyes, and lips that trembled nervously as she spoke, Harold felt a little moved to pity; which, however, soon vanished. Though bodily weak, a new spirit seemed to have entered into her. In vain Harold pressed his suit. In vain Mr. Langley, giving way to her peremptory refusal to entertain even an idea of repeating the marriage, sought to draw from her a promise, that so soon as the first ceremony was legally set aside she would become Harold's wife.

"I know not how it is, uncle," she said in reply to some strong remonstrances of his one evening about a week after Harold's mischance, as she sat half reclining on the settle by the fire, which glowed and blazed, casting a strong light on her slender figure and black dress, and leaving Langley in shadow; while Harold, ostentatiously performing the lover's part, sat on a low seat beside her. They were gathered in the dining-room, where she had reluctantly joined the father and son at their evening meal for the first time since her indisposition. "I know not

how it is, but since I said, or heard, those solemn words before God's altar, I feel I cannot say them to Harold. No ! I cannot, I will not," she added, with languid decision. "Why do you urge me to be your wife, cousin ?" looking at him steadily ; "you do not care for me ! every fine speech you make tells me so ; and I do not fear to say I do not care for you. It will not hurt you ! You will find many a finer lady than I am ready to wed you—I cannot."

"What !" said Langley, with a coarse sneer. "Has your vagrant fancy been caught by the ruffian who personated my son ?"

"I have no fancies," she said sadly, yet with dignity. "So far am I from entertaining any, that I pray you—I call upon you, as my guardian—to set me free from the terrible bond that links me to I know not whom."

"And so I will, my ward, if you promise to wed Harold the day that mock marriage is dissolved," returned Langley grimly.

"That I will not," cried Maud petulantly. "What am I ? What is it that makes you thus persist ?"

"Ay, what indeed !" said Langley in a low

stern tone, while he rose and paced the room; “what, save a desire to benefit your father’s daughter? Girl, do you know that you are a beggar, dependent on my bounty for the food you eat, and the clothes you wear; and because few men will wed a penniless helpless gentlewoman, I give you to my son, who, out of chivalrous kindness to his kinswoman, consents to take you? Girl! you should in mere gratitude yield us both implicit obedience. What are you, insignificant isolated atom, that you dare to cross my will?”

Langley, feeling secure and unspeakably infuriated, let go for a moment the reins of his self-control.

“Hush, hush, father! ’tis too harsh,” cried Harold, the instinct of good manner revolting against this brutality.

But Maud, with the imprudent daring of youth, rose from her seat and, confronting her guardian, said, with a tinge of contempt in her clear low voice:

“I thank you, Master Langley; but you need not cumber yourself with me. There are still those friends in France—from whom, against their will, you took me—I wish to go

to them, if you are weary of returning to my father's daughter something of the benefits he bestowed — something of the generosity which even admitted your claim to brotherhood."

The moment the words passed Maud's lips she felt that what she said had turned the scale, and transformed her guardian into a deadly implacable foe ; yet she stood gallantly at bay, nor did her eye flinch from the encounter with Langley's, turned on her with a glance before which she might well quail.

"Well, madam, I thank you for your candour ; but it does not lessen my determination to benefit you." He paused a moment. "Two days hence we will start for town ; and there I shall take the measures necessary to dissolve one marriage and celebrate the other."

"Call my woman—call Dorothy," said the young lady, with an air of command, to Harold ; "and, gentlemen, I wish you both good-night."

With a haughty bow, she swept past Langley, her head erect and her step steady ; but when alone with Dorothy, in what

agonies of tears she clung to her—how she sobbed with rage and fear!

“Can we not get away? is there no escape?”

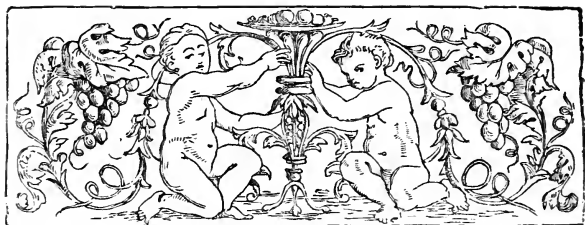
And Dorothy, with tenderest sympathy and gruffest tones said:

“God help you, my lamb! there’s no escape for empty pockets.”

While Langley, not a little startled, and vexed too, at his own momentary want of self-control, poured out a bumper of claret and draining it, said, with a constrained smile:

“A vixen! but we will tame her—eh, boy? Come, you cannot deny that there is fire beneath the snow!”

“Ay, sir; but somewhat volcanic.”



## CHAPTER IV.

**T**HE Countess of Helmsford sat at her toilette one foggy evening about the beginning of the year.

The Countess was a great lady—a beauty still—a wit—a politician—an institution of London life in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The dinners and card-parties of Lady Helmsford were heavens of fashion into which the outsiders strove for admission with far more of purpose and untiring application than they did to make their “calling and election sure.” The Countess was nobly born, nobly wed, and early widowed. Tory by birth and early association—Whig by choice—through a certain



cold clearness of intellect, which generally guided her right, save when passion blinded her with the gold dust of delusion.

She was a large voluptuously-formed woman, with a pale olive complexion, and dusky shading of the upper lip quite un-English.

A stately commanding woman, formed by Nature for a great lady. And now she sat before her toilette-table gazing intently on her mirror, while with her own fair discriminating hand she fixed the quaintly-cut patches contained in a box held by an obsequious waiting-woman on the plump and delicately-rouged cheeks, which, one after the other, she turned to the light of the wax-tapers in the girandole.

"There, Beville, I need add no more. In truth, it is sad waste of labour and of time. There is no one in town worth dressing for, only worn-out old rakes and insipid young ones. Ah, Beville, there is not one, Whig or Tory, to compare with that splendid Spaniard who dazzled us all in Paris last autumn."

Lady Helmsford spoke to her maid with the sort of contemptuous confidence tyrants bestow on slaves they imagine too lowly to judge or to disapprove.

“Indeed, my lady, he was a proper man—and a generous. Why, none of the marquises or dukes who were courting your ladyship were half as open-handed. But I warrant he was a prince in his own country.”

“That I cannot possibly answer for,” returned the great lady, with a short laugh. “As like he was some bold wanderer from the Spanish main, though he was recognised by many of the Spanish grandees in Paris. No matter, Beville; there is a fire and manhood in these carvers of their own fortune that make them irresistible.”

The Countess rose as she spoke, and slowly paced to and fro.

“He was a gentleman too,” she went on, as if speaking to herself. “How strange his disappearance! Just when I had won him from that proud beautiful Marquise de Boisville. And she was younger—years younger than I am.”

Again she seated herself before her glass, and gazed at her own image intently. “Yes, years younger. But she has neither my passion nor my purpose, still there is marvellous witchery in youth.” She paused, and

struck her own brow lightly with her clenched hand. "Why can neither power nor will keep back the growing shadows of age? Hateful age! Had I youth, Beville, he never would have left me without a word—without a line! But I will not madden myself with these thoughts. My latest fancy still reigns, because nothing has arisen to displace it. God knows how willingly I would welcome a fresh impression."

While the Countess spoke, Mistress Beville's quick ear distinguished a low knock at the door; and softly opening it, she held a whispered conference with some one outside.

"What's that, Beville?" called Lady Helmsford imperiously.

"There are two women below begging to have speech with your ladyship," replied Beville.

"Two women! Who and what are they that I should admit them, and at this hour?" cried the Countess.

"They say they can only tell their business to your ladyship."

"They must then. I am not at the beck and call of every impostor that chooses to apply to me."

At this the messenger without departed, but before ten minutes had elapsed again tapped at the door. This time she handed a scrap of paper to Mistress Beville, who, with a curtsy presented it to her lady. The Countess, looking at it disdainfully, read the following words :

“For God’s sake, madam, do not refuse to see your only sister’s child. Maud Langley.”

The Countess was standing in the middle of the room as she glanced at these lines, and she remained silent a few moments. A whole gulf of years suddenly bridged over, as her own stormy restless youth—her bright soft sister—her frank, gallant, simple-minded brother-in-law, once most dear to her—all rose up out of the mists of time clear and vivid. Her haughty face, however, did not soften ; rather the small hand, with its fleshy palm and slight long-nailed fingers, clutched the paper with increasing tightness that implied displeasure.

“Admit them,” she said at length. She remained standing for the few minutes that intervened, the same dreamy outlook in her eyes, though lip and brow were unrelaxed. —

Soon the door reopened, and two women, wrapped in large cloaks with hoods which almost covered their faces, entered. The taller of the two stopped respectfully just within the door; the other advancing quickly to Lady Helmsford, and throwing back her hood showed the sweet arch face of Maud Langley, so fair with the inexpressible beauty of innocent youth that Lady Helmsford involuntarily frowned.

“Do not reject a suppliant, madam,” said Maud, taking the Countess’s disengaged hand and kissing it, while she spoke entreatingly and playfully; poor spoiled pet as she had been, she did not dream of rejection, specially from a woman. Scarce remembering a mother, she had always yearned for a mother’s love, and imagined a mother’s sister, herself childless, must offer the nearest approach to that tender relationship. The Countess still kept silent, standing in the midst of her splendidly-furnished and decorated dressing-room—the picture of power and wealth—the long full folds of her gorgeous silk *robe de chambre* falling over her hoop to the floor, her jewelled hand still in Maud’s; and Maud looking up,

her soft brown hair disordered by the hood she had just thrown back, smiling yet tearfully.

"And how am I to know you are my niece, young lady?" asked the Countess at length, slowly, reluctantly.

"Look on me, dear aunt; and see this," drawing from her pocket a small richly-bound book, which she opened to show the Countess her own writing on the fly-leaf.

"Yes," said Lady Helmsford, "you *are* like your mother. I do not doubt you are Lord Langdale's daughter, so sit here by me, and say why you have come. I understood you were safe under John Langley's guardianship, and had been, or were about to be, married to his son—a very proper, and on his part disinterested, arrangement—with which," continued Lady Helmsford, lifting up her hand to stop Maud from speaking, "I did not interfere, because for many years your father and I were not friends. He disliked me much, and I always pay back what I get."

"I have heard somewhat of this," returned Maud, her eyes filling and terribly chilled by

her reception ; “ but does not death obliterate such bitterness ? Let me, however, tell my tale—then reject me if you will.”

In as few words as she could, Maud detailed her removal from the neighbourhood of St. Germain by John Langley ; her loneliness and melancholy life at Langdale Priory ; her reluctant consent to wed Harold—chiefly to escape the monotony she found so oppressive ; then the mysterious substitution of a total stranger for the intended bridegroom, and the curious circumstances which ensued. “ Finding that they could not induce me nor my good friend Mr. Everard to consent to a repetition of the marriage ceremony,” she continued, “ my uncle was sore displeased, and some five or six weeks ago my good Dorothy and I had sudden orders to prepare to start with Mr. Langley for London next day. We had a long and toilsome journey. Since then we have lodged in Mr. Langley’s house ; and every day, every day ! Harold persecutes me, and says he loves me, though I read something more akin to hatred in his eyes. And John Langley is so smooth—so dark. Oh ! I have a dread of evil more than I dare picture to

myself ! So at last Dorothy, with much pains-taking, found you were in London, and where ; and though I had no money, she had four gold pieces that that gentleman gave her the day of the marriage ; but they were not English pieces and she had trouble to change them. To-night John Langley dines with Lord Berkeley, and a young girl came with some needlework Dorothy had given her ; so I wrapped myself in her cloak and stole out in her place ; Dorothy followed and called a coach. I marvel how she escaped, for we were well watched. But she turned the key on the poor girl, and she will be prisoner there till supper-time. And I am here to ask you for safety—for life ! Oh, aunt—dear aunt, do not send me back to those terrible men again !”

Lady Helmsford had listened intently to this recital, while her busy brain turned over the material presented to it, contriving how she might weave it into the warp and woof of her own web. To reject her niece she saw would never do, either for her character or her influence ; she therefore said, more cordially than she had hitherto spoken :



“No, child, no! you shall remain under my protection, at any rate until I have seen and conferred with Mr. Langley. Beville, let a chamber be prepared for my niece; and this person—your woman, I suppose?”

“My nurse when I was but eight years old—my friend ever since,” said Maud, stretching out her hand to Dorothy.

“Ah! Should you like her to share your room?” asked Lady Helmsford indifferently.

“O yes! I am too frightened—too shaken—to be left alone. But to-night I shall sleep so peacefully—so safe—thanks to you, dear aunt.”

“It is well,” returned the Countess. “I am obliged to go out to-night; but Beville and the housekeeper will see that you are properly attended to. You had better conduct Mistress Langley to the yellow drawing-room; and, Beville, be sure you send Chifferil to me.”

Beville conducted the fugitives to a comparatively small apartment, hung with amber satin, and, like the rest of the mansion, richly furnished; here, she said, supper should be served, and then left them.

“At last, Dorothy, I feel safe,” cried Maud, throwing her arms round the stiff figure of her humble friend.

“And so you are, my birdie, anyhow for a while; though I like not yon Countess—she is cold and hard. I wish we were back in France, my child.”

“Ah! so do I. But now we have escaped John Langley, perhaps we shall manage that also,” cried Maud hopefully.

“Perhaps,” sighed Dorothy, not liking to damp her young mistress, yet thinking to herself, “And who will pay for the journey, and how should we live?” for she well knew her beloved nursling was penniless and dependent.

Meantime Mistress Beville returned to her lady and reported Mr. Clifferil absent.

“Gone out?” repeated the Countess, with haughty incredulity. “Impossible! Send and search the house. He has never dared absent himself without leave before. It cannot be.”

But it was so. The favourite secretary, the obedient right-hand man, was not to be found. Now, when Lady Helmsford especially

wanted him for a mission of importance, Chifferil was absent without leave.

While this scene was being enacted at the Countess of Helmsford's grand mansion, the habitual frequenters of "Lamb's Coffee-house," as an obscure tavern situated in a court of the same name was called, were gradually assembling. Lamb's Court was reached by a short narrow passage, scarce wide enough for two persons abreast, opening on the north side of Holborn, a little east of the Bars, and although obscure, was yet well known to a large circle of curious patrons. Men who had mystic signs of recognition, who used peculiar phrases and swore strange oaths; men to whom money was a fluctuating possession, being one month unaccountably flush of cash, and another as unaccountably penniless. Foreigners too resorted there, and travellers of high and low degree.

The landlord was a huge sailor-like personage, with a gruff voice and jovial manner. He was a Guernseyman, whose long life (he was now old) must have been a roving one,

for his knowledge of foreign languages and foreign moneys was remarkable, as was also the excellence of the spirits, tobacco, and coffee to be had at his establishment, while Continental doings were generally reported at "Lamb's" with unusual correctness.

The coffee-room was a large, low, not over clean apartment, with a great projecting fireplace. It opened into the court beneath the overhanging upper story ; behind it were dark passages and two or three chambers, as brown and dingy as the general room, but possessing a narrow and cautiously-marked outlet into a miserable crooked lane at the back, which, after many turnings, led to some famous stables near Hatton Garden, where the hard-ridden nags of the gentlemen of the road found provender and repose.

This cold December night then, somewhere about the same time that Maud Langley was suing for her aunt's protection, the *habitués* of "Lamb's," as it was familiarly termed, were dropping in. They were not of a class easily deterred by weather from rambling abroad—principally because they had no very settled abodes ; "Lamb's" was about the nearest

approach most of them knew to home. They were a motley crew, variable in spirits and fluctuating in attire. He who was last week in the lowest condition of toilette would next appear radiant in powder, perfume, rings, lace, and braveries abundant. Of such changes the frequenters of "Lamb's" were far too well bred to take notice. Moreover they knew each other to be ready to "draw" on the smallest provocation, and that most of those who "thereabouts did congregate" were no mean masters of fence.

On this special evening five or six of the graver and more staid customers were seated at the little tables with which the coffee-room was furnished, in Continental fashion, drinking coffee, chocolate, or more stimulating beverages ; while a group of the latest arrivals gathered round the fire. The loudest talker amongst them was a stout broad-built man, his flowing wig somewhat awry, and showing the rough grizzled hair beneath. His dress, of fine and showy material, had evidently been ill-treated ; while his small bloodshot eye, coarse cruel mouth, and swaggering reckless manner stamped him as one of those des-

peradoes who, with nothing to lose, are ready for any work from which honest men would shrink. The others, evidently of the same class, a shade better perhaps, were listening; and one gaunt, grey, old soldier-looking man, of remarkable height, stood silent within the shadow of the projecting fireplace.

“Yes, my boys,” the orator was saying, “I was in grand company to-day. I had the honour of a salute from the Duchess of B—— on the Mall, and had a smile too from the beautiful Mistress C——. Ay! she would give me more than a smile if I asked for it. But I am going to reform, to grow a respectable loyal gentleman, nay, nobleman rather. I am going to elope with an heiress!”

“With or without her consent?” asked a shrewd-looking fellow, considerably younger than the first speaker.

“Consent—ten thousand devils! yes. I am married to her already, only it did not suit me to set up housekeeping all at once. Come you, Bill, Peter—what’s your name? Bring wine, and good Nantes. You shall drink my health, boys—and my bride’s.”

“Name ! name !” shouted the bystanders boisterously.

“Mistress Nathaniel Morley,” returned the gallant, giving his own appellation with such an exaggerated air of dignity and importance that a shout of laughter broke from his hearers.

“*Née* what ?” asked one of them.

“What’s that to you, who she was ? and what she has is my business.”

“Some publican’s widow ?” suggested one.

“No, no, no !” shouted Morley. Then, sinking his voice, he went on, “A high-born beauteous lady. Fair, tender, sweet, scarce nineteen. And here’s the wine ! Come, now who will help a virtuous loving pair to escape the toils of envious relatives and cruel guardians ? Come, you Hardy, Stephens, Ellis, you are of the right sort ! I want your help, and helping me you shall get a lift yourselves.”

So saying he placed himself at a table in the angle to the right of the fireplace, tolerably secure from intruders, where the men he had invited sat down with him and seemed to listen with profound attention to some propo-

sition propounded by Morley with much gesticulation and many oaths, which every now and then rose articulate above the carefully-subdued undertone of his speech.

Meantime some more customers had quietly entered and called for what refreshment they needed ; and the last comer, a little thin man with spidery legs, a wizened face, and eager, restless, light-grey eyes peering from beneath a wig of disproportioned magnitude, laid aside a cloak from which he shook the half-melted snow, and crept close to the fire, a cup of chocolate in his hand. "Give you good-even, gentlemen," he said to those still standing round. His precise voice and neat prim dress looked in strange contrast to the rest. A general "good-evening" was given him in return, and after a few remarks on the weather, the little man asked, "How is the good host ? I have not been here for a long time, and miss him from his accustomed place."

"I believe the old gentleman is tolerably well, but less active than he used to be," replied one of the more respectable of the bystanders. "He seldom honours us with his



presence now. He has scarce been in the coffee-room since last autumn, when the Spaniard used to be here."

"Ah, indeed," returned the first speaker, who appeared to be in a very fidgety and expectant state, glancing at the door and edging now nearer the fire, now nearer the party engrossed by Morley's exposition of his scheme.

"Ay," remarked one of the older *habitués*, "that Spaniard was a great chum of the host's. He always brought his coffee himself, and used to take him into his own room, and I'll warrant gave him no end of prime liquor."

"And how long may it be since this Spaniard was here?" asked the gaunt man in the chimney-nook, who had hitherto kept silence, and now spoke with a peculiar tone and accent—not foreign and not English.

"Three months or more," said one.

"Not so long," insisted another.

"These Spaniards are slippery chaps," said the gaunt man, carelessly rising as he spoke. "Here to-day and gone to-morrow;" so saying he began to hum a rude ditty, and, boldly striding up to Morley, startled him with a

sudden heavy slap on the shoulder. "Hey, old ratcatcher! Hast forgotten thy comrade? Come, let me share what's going. We have had many a forage together, and I never robbed you of your fair half. What's going, I say."

"Why, it can't be; but yes it *is* the Blazer," cried Morley, starting up, but looking more surprised than pleased. "I thought you were dead and buried; some said drowned, but I never believed *that*."

"Alive, man, alive! to serve your fortunes, if so be that they serve mine."

"Sit down then," cried Morley more cordially; whereupon the gaunt man joined the party in the angle, and soon absorbed the larger share of the talk, to say nothing of his full proportion of drink.

He had not long been thus engaged when the outer door again opened to admit yet another visitor—a tall figure wrapped in a wide dark cloak, one corner of which was thrown carelessly, yet not ungracefully, over the right shoulder; a slouched hat of soft felt completed the almost total concealment of his face and figure. Yet was there something in his gait

and carriage that bespoke a status far above the ordinary frequenters of "Lamb's." He paused on reaching the centre of the room, and bowing, raised his hand to his hat without removing it, as a sort of salutation to the company, and called to one of the tapsters in a deep commanding tone, "Pedro;" whereupon the man, evidently recognising the voice, came running up, bowed obsequiously, and asked some question in Spanish, to which the other replied in the same language; at which the tapster disappeared through an inner door.

The new comer then approached the fire, and, addressing the little nervous chocolate-drinker courteously, after some remarks on the weather, observed, "I have surely had the pleasure of meeting you before—in Paris?"

"Yes, certainly," said the little man, changing from one foot to the other so quickly that the spoon rattled in the cup he still held. "I remember you well, sir, and it gives me much satisfaction to renew the acquaintance."

"Perhaps then you will do me the honour

to sup. They cook one or two dishes very passably here?"

"Sir, your invitation is an honour not to be declined," returned the precise gentleman, and as he spoke the door by which the waiter or tapster had disappeared reopened, and a man of great girth and corpulence rolled rather than walked into the room.

He was dark eyed, dark skinned, with a broad, bold, honest face. This was the landlord, Jacques, or, as he was more usually called, Jack Robilliard. Disregarding all his other guests, he at once made his way to the gentleman who had just invited the chocolate-drinker to supper, and taking the hand held out to him with the most profound respect, they spoke together for a few minutes somewhat eagerly in French, interlarded with some exclamations in Spanish.

"Allons, Monsieur," said the gentleman at length, laying his hand on his guest's shoulder, "let's retire and enjoy our morsel in peace;" and he motioned Robilliard to lead the way.

The room into which the host ushered them was destitute of carpet and very simply furnished. Nevertheless a blazing fire and

curtains of some thick red stuff gave it an air of comfort and warmth most acceptable on such a night. Near the fire stood a small table, on which the tapster Peter was rapidly setting forth the array requisite for a repast, which was neater and even more ornamental than could have been expected in such a place. As soon as they entered he left the room, and the host, closing the door, stood by it in an attitude of respectful expectation. The Spaniard, as he appeared to be, threw off his cloak and hat with a gesture of relief, and approaching the fire, spread his hands to the flame, and then rubbing them together, turned to face his guest and Robilliard. He was a tall, though not specially tall, man—of twenty-eight or thirty, broad shouldered, though otherwise slight of make ; simply dressed in dark claret-coloured cloth, with heavy foreign-looking gold buttons. The expression of his bronzed face was resolute and stern when in repose, and his glance was especially keen and bold. His hair—thick, curly, and almost black—was worn without powder—simply tied back with a ribbon, so as to form some approach to that

indispensable appendage a *queue*; this and a short, thick, dark moustache completed the un-English aspect of his whole person.

“Come, Master Chifferil,” he said in English, though with a slight foreign accent—a pleasant smile lighting up his dark eyes and softening his face. “Draw near the fire, Master Chifferil. Bah!” he continued, as he noticed the uneasy glance shot by the little man in the direction of the host. “You need not distrust Robilliard. He is the stanchest truest old dog between this and the Antilles—as faithful to the Langleys as myself or you.”

“I am sure our worthy host deserves all trust,” returned Chifferil nervously; “but these are troublous times, and if it be known that *I*, the secretary of—no matter who,” checking himself, “come here at all, why, I shall not only be undone myself, which is small matter, but be of little further use to you in this affair.”

“Can he be of any use anyhow, Excellency?” asked Robilliard somewhat scornfully, as he looked indignantly at the speaker.

“Ay, ay,” returned the Spaniard, laughing;

“do not be unmannerly, man. Remember, I generally know what I am about, and we want brains as well as thews and sinews. Master Chifferil does well to be prudent.”

The host bowed.

“And how goes it with yourself, Robilliard, brave old boy?”

“Cheerily, sir, cheerily; though time begins to press somewhat heavily on me, and men are not what they were. The King over the water has fewer friends than ever. Men come here from Lorraine and the Hague brimful of loyalty and devotion—pshaw! a week’s contact with Londoners cools them down mighty fast.”

“That cannot be helped,” returned the Spaniard, gazing at the fire and speaking as though to himself. “The Stuarts are a helpless doomed race. I was born a Jacobite, but time shows me they will not do. The Hanover men—German boors though they be—are better kings for England. But come, good host, let’s have supper, and a bottle of your rare Burgundy after, with your own good company to heighten its flavour.”

There was kindly familiarity mingled with

command in the speaker's manner. Robilliard bowed, and was leaving the room when his evidently important guest called after him in French :

“There is a tall rusty-looking man among the drinking party by the fireplace. Don't let him go till I have spoken with him. I think he is one I have long looked for.”

“I'll see to him, Excellency ; I'll see to him,” returned Robilliard, and turned away, almost coming in collision with the waiter, who now brought in an appetising supper—a roast pheasant, an omelette, and one or two small dainty foreign dishes, with a flask of wine. Having duly set forth these viands he departed.

“Now then, Master Chifferil, let us fall to,” said the entertainer ; “and while we supply our bodies with sustenance you shall satisfy my soul with news. Indeed, 'tis such a night I feared you would not attend my summons.”

“No, no, sir,” cried Chifferil, seating himself and unfolding his napkin with alacrity, while he spoke with a droll assumption of energy. “No weather—nothing would have



kept me from the rendezvous. The hint in your letter of the plan afoot would have fired me to face worse things than a shower of sleet, Monsieur de Monteiro."

"Per Dios! you are a man of mettle, Master Chifferil. Tell me first how fares the adorable Countess?"

"Oh, well; right well," mumbled Chifferil, his mouth full of pheasant, "and more imperious than ever. By the blessing of Heaven she had done with me rather earlier than usual, and went to dress for a reception or a card-party, or I should not have been here in time for your appointment; but I just slipped out so soon as she summoned her woman, and no one will know whether I am at home or abroad."

"Cunningly managed," replied the Spaniard, filling his guest's glass to the brim. "And does your noble mistress deign to remember the strange caballero she used to notice in Paris?"

"I think so, I think so," said Chifferil reflectively, ceasing to ply his knife and fork for an instant. "It was only three or four days back when she asked me, if amid the

town gossip (her ladyship always looks to me for tidings—all manner of things) if I had heard ought of Don Juan di Monteiro, and I answered, ‘No!’ He, he, he! I answered ‘No!’” the little man chuckled at the notion of misleading his haughty mistress.

“Well, I must renew my acquaintance with the beautiful Countess; for know, my good Chifferil, I intend to employ her services.”

“Employ my lady the Countess!” repeated Chifferil, aghast at so daring a proposition. “Good lack! sir, she is more like to employ you.”

“We shall see,” returned the Don, with a gay defiant laugh; “and now what have you gathered of John Langley? What of his lacquered fopling of a son?”

“I only was able to find out last week. They are in town.”

“And the projected marriage—has that been carried out?”

As he asked this Monteiro filled himself a bumper; his expression had visibly changed as he spoke of the Langleys, and he now looked eagerly for Chifferil’s answer.

“I think not; I think not. Anyway, I could gain no certain intelligence—save that there is a young lady under Langley’s care, no doubt his ward, the late lord’s daughter.”

“The young Baroness Langdale!” exclaimed Monteiro; “a bumper to her, Chifferil! My lady’s health!—I have devoted myself to her service for the present—and confusion to her foes! That base hound, John Langley, shall never wed her to his son—never!”

“Alack! honoured sir, I know not how you can prevent it. John Langley is strong and resolute, and stands well with men now in power.”

“Hear me,” replied Monteiro, with a frown; “but first tell me, what is it links you so closely to the house of Langley?”

“’Tis an old and a long tale, sir; but in bygone days Lord Langdale was a good friend to me in more ways than one. He saved a fair young sister of mine from a sad fate, and lifted us both out of the mire of poverty. I was a clerk when John Langley was first being noticed as a clever lawyer, and I always mistrusted his friendship for my lord. Then

Lord Langdale was forced to fly, and I heard no more of him for years ; till, happening to be in Paris with my lady nigh a year ago, I managed to steal away to see him, and found him near death, in a by-street of that gay town ; for he was too poor to follow the Chevalier to Lorraine. He knew me, and was pleased I showed gratitude ; and so I went once and again while he lasted. You remember 'twas at his lodgings I first saw you ; but you were too late—he had died that morning.”

“Yes, it was most unfortunate,” said Monteiro, rising to pace the room. “How was it,” he asked after a short silence, “that Lady Helmsford did not assume the guardianship of her niece ?”

“There were many reasons,” replied Chifferil sadly. “My lady hated the late lord sore—she knew not of his death till a week or more after ; and when she asked for her niece, she had gone with a good lady, the widow of one of King James’s officers, who had almost brought her up—none knew whither, or my lady did not care to inquire. Then word came that Lord Langdale had left

her to his bastard brother's care ; next that John Langley had fetched her away to England, and meant to wed her to his son. Now, my respected host, will you condescend to tell me wherefore you, a stranger, a foreigner, take so much interest in this orphan ? Why have you so fierce a hatred to John Langley ?”

“ I will tell you,” said Monteiro, again replenishing Chifferil's glass. “ But it is a long tale. I too owe some duty, some gratitude, to the house of Langdale. Have you ever heard of an uncle of the late lord's—a certain Rupert Langley ?”

“ Yes, I have just heard his name.”

“ Well,” continued the Spaniard, speaking rapidly, “ Rupert Langley was always a wild and somewhat reckless gallant, and ever loved the sea. While a lad of seventeen he was an officer on board King James's own ship, when, as Lord High Admiral of England, he fought De Ruyter and his Dutchmen so fiercely off Southwold Bay. For some time Rupert was near the King's person ; but he was too honest to cringe to priest or favourite—his favour flagged. He fought a duello with a Catholic noble, who had displeased some lady beloved

by him, and wounded his adversary to death ; so he was forbidden the Court. In disgust, he took to a seafaring life, and became one of the most famous rovers of the Spanish main—a gentleman rover. I had the honour of serving under him from boyhood.”

At this announcement Chifferil looked up with a visible shiver.

“Does that frighten you?” said Monteiro, laughing. “Ah ! my good friend, I wish all you landsmen were as honest fellows as the brave buccaneers ! Let me tell you we have our own code. Never did El Veloz point a gun at any vessel bearing the flag of Old England. We certainly punished the Dutch and the Portuguese, and sometimes had a brush with a Frenchman ; but the Captain was always true to his colours, and merciful too—a saint, an angel of light, compared to the old rovers of whom you have heard. But to finish my tale. When his old commander’s troubles closed round him, Rupert Langley could not refrain from coming to his help ; for he was at that time often to and fro the northern ports of Spain, and learned what was going on. He was, I have been told, present at

some of the fighting in Ireland, and aided many of the fugitives to escape in his famous cruiser to France and elsewhere. Then, as his King's cause seemed hopeless, he left these latitudes; nor did he revisit them for many years—not till I had grown to be his lieutenant and right-hand. Then, for reasons I cannot go into now, he sent me to London about three years ago. My mission was to see Lord Langdale, his nephew, and deliver into his own hand a letter. I was also to seek out John Langley, on whom Rupert looked as a promising young man, devoted to the family with which he had the honour to be, even in a side way, connected."

"Just so," put in Chifferil; "that was the character he bore when I knew him in his struggling days—when my Lord Langdale, who was many years his junior, had just come into the estate, and begun to help him."

"The scoundrel!" muttered Monteiro. "I tell you, Master Chifferil, the gentlemen rovers are holy saints compared to such a man as this."

"Your honour is right," cried Chifferil, with somewhat abject readiness.

“ Well, I found Lord Langdale in exile ; and John Langley sole representative of the once potent house. He received me well ; expressed much regard for his uncle ; but I never quite took to the fellow. Nor did I show the letter I had for Lord Langdale. I accomplished little or nothing of the matter on which I had been sent, and returned to my—my noble commander, who awaited me at Brest. He was wroth with me for my distrust ; and, faith ! I was a while in disgrace. Then I believe he contrived to communicate with Langley himself. However, the rising in Scotland was soon after talked of ; and Rupert Langley, ever hopeful of the Stuart cause, threw himself heart and soul into the undertaking. His idea was, to rouse the people of the south coast at the same time that Mar raised the standard in the North. He thought he could count on the Langdale men ; and, utterly deceived by John Langley, fancied he could certainly trust him. So, with a large store of arms and ammunition, we sailed from Cherbourg, and stood off and on between Hastings and Hythe. All suspicion being directed to the



North, we were unmolested, and even sent a boat ashore at Rye, according to some signal my—Captain had agreed upon with John Langley. We met a messenger from him, who had a letter, the purport of which was that, if we liked, we could land our cargo the following night ; that he would find a place of safety wherein to stow it ; and that all was going well. I persuaded my noble friend and patron not to take aught with him in the first boat, simply to make sure of the ground. Indeed, I strove hard to make him stay behind ; but, alas ! I could not.” The Spaniard paused a moment, and bent his head on his hand on his hand. “ Alas ! I could not,” he resumed. “ We landed on a pitch-dark night, and were received by an ambush—soldiers placed to trap us ! However, they did not count on the sort of foe they roused : we fought our way desperately back to the boat, but not before the Captain was wounded—shot by Langley himself !”

“ How could you tell that in so dark a night ?” asked Chifferil eagerly.

“ Because it had been a dry autumn, and the scene of our encounter was high up on

the beach, where furze-bushes and coarse grass grew plentifully. These caught fire in the fray, and blazing up, I distinctly saw Langley level his pistol at our leader. He fell, and though he rose again and managed, with help, to reach the boat, he was dead before we could convey him on board—dead! the truest, the best! Well, Master John Langley captured neither arms nor ammunition, nor does he know if his victim lived or died, nor that *I* witnessed the murder; but from that day I have vowed to revenge the treachery. I could never bring John Langley to justice, but I shall punish him my own way. I was left in command of our ship and crew, and was obliged to visit the Bahamas before I could follow up my revered commander's last injunction, to see and warn Lord Langdale. When I did, it was too late—he had breathed his last. Since I have not been able to accomplish much, yet I have not been quite idle."

"This is indeed a curious history," said Chifferil, who had listened with deep yet uneasy curiosity.

"But I have not quite finished," resumed

the Spaniard. "Rupert Langley had heard in his last visit to France a rumour that the late Queen had granted a pardon to Lord Langdale, reinstating him in all his rights. I have since ascertained this to be a fact, but where the document is to be found, and in whose possession, no one knows. If John Langley has got hold of it, adieu to one means of punishment. If it is above ground, *out* of his possession, it will go hard but I will contrive to find it."

"Dear! dear! I tremble to think of my lord's young daughter being in that cruel bad man's hands!" cried Chifferil.

"What think you are his designs on that poor child?" asked the other.

"My lady heard, when first we returned, that he intended to marry her to his son, young Captain Langley of the Guards."

"And why does not your lady prevent so cruel a sacrifice? The young lady has doubtless been well and tenderly nurtured, and to give her a husband such as he—pah! I am no saint, but it turns me sick. It must not be!" Monteiro spoke with some heat.

"I fear me much that by this time it must

be accomplished," returned Chifferil, with some timidity. "Nay, more, my noble mistress wondered at the prudent Master Langley being so ready to wed his son to the penniless orphan of an exile, which—"

"Is a proof he knows the pardon exists," interrupted Monteiro eagerly.

Chifferil nodded assent.

"Now then, my good friend Chifferil, my scheme is to induce the Countess to adopt and protect her niece. She must be told that this pardon exists; that, so far from being a penniless orphan, Maud Langley is a peeress and an heiress. She would not like to see her niece wed to a nobody both by nature and station."

"Ay, sir, it would be the right thing for the young lady to be under the Countess's charge; but who will speak to her? who will care to 'bell so fierce a cat'?"

"I would if I thought it would mend matters," said Monteiro, as if to himself, "but it would *not*. Could you not manage, as purveyor of news, to drop a hint that such a rumour is whispered? or, better still, suggest to the fair orphan to claim her aunt's protection?"

“I might—I might,” returned Chifferil reluctantly. “But how, worthy sir, if the marriage is *un fait accompli*?”

“I will blow the bridegroom’s brains out,” cried Monteiro fiercely; and then, catching a glimpse of Chifferil’s dismayed expression, he laughed. “However, I hope to accomplish my designs without such clumsy work; but time presses. The best means that I can see to induce the Countess to receive her niece is for that young lady to throw herself on her aunt’s protection. The question is, how to communicate with her? Can you manage it?”

“Hardly, sir, hardly,” returned Chifferil, with a slight shiver; “and yet I will risk somewhat; yes”—with a sudden uprearing of the head and stiffening of the back—“I will not be overcome by any mean thought of self. I shall ascertain if the lady is really in town, and then I shall somehow let her know that her best chance of safety is in flight. But suppose this young Captain has taken her fancy? They do say he is a pretty fellow.”

“Caramba!” cried Monteiro, starting from his seat impatiently to pace the floor once to

and fro. "I did not think of that! And she is young, and has seen so little;" reseating himself. "If so, why, it will be the nearest to a checkmate I can suffer. Rather than her fancy should go astray for want of a proper object, I would enter the lists with Harold Langley myself. I should have no objection to a fair well-dowered English wife;" and he smiled with an air of gay coxcombry that sat well on him.

"You wed the Lady of Langdale! You, a—" exclaimed the little secretary, almost losing his head with horrified astonishment, but pulling up before he uttered the objectionable word.

"A freebooter you would say! What matter? I have known as great ladies as the young Baroness who thought none the worse of me for my career! And let me tell you, my friend, that if she is not to my taste, I would not seek her had she a kingdom for her dowry. Beauty," he went on, as he filled his glass and raised it high, "beauty and grace, and youth and tenderness! What are wealth and rank to these? I'll never wreck the joy of life by running my craft

among the shoals of greed. No ! Let me win place and wealth with this and this"—touching his brow and sword-hilt—"and all I ask of the woman I love or will love is to be charming."

"Time runs swiftly," was Chifferil's answer to this outburst. "I must soon return or I may be asked for."

"First," cried Monteiro, "let us plan how we may mask our operations. You undertake to warn Mademoiselle Langley?"

"I do—I do ! I am not without wit or invention I assure you. He, he, he!" said Chifferil, with a knowing nod.

"No doubt there is a mine of stratagem under your periwig," returned Monteiro pleasantly, "so I leave that to you. But between ourselves there must be free and rapid communication. Wait," he added, holding up his hand for silence. He thought for a few moments with knitted brow. "I have it," he said at length ; "is there a corner or a crossing suitable for a professional beggar near your lady's mansion ? and is it unoccupied ?"

"Well, I can scarce say ; but beggars can stroll everywhere."

“Then look in your walks for a lame sailor with one arm, and a blue-and-white checked kerchief round his head. He will always address you as ‘Señor.’ In reply, ask him what grain he likes ; and he shall answer, ‘Rye.’ Can you remember this ? Note it down—the words only ; they will give no clue to any save yourself. To this man you can give *anything* for me.”

“This seems rare cunning,” returned Chifferil, rubbing his hands ; “and, respected sir, ’tis my custom to take the exercise requisite for my health during my lady’s breakfast (about ten o’clock) and in the afternoon at four.”

“Ay, I shall keep it in mind. And you must go ? Well, good Master Chifferil, had you not better tell your lady you had met me ? that I asked much respecting her—that I long to present myself to her ; and add anything more you like. Above all, lose no time in warning the young heiress. If I can help, call upon me.”

“Good-night. I must away,” said Chifferil, rising with evident reluctance. “The way is long, and later ’twill be dangerous.”



“Have you pistols? No. Take one of mine then,” said his host carelessly.

“I thank you, sir—I do not love firearms. The good Robilliard will perhaps let one of his young men come with me into Holborn and call a coach?”

“Ay, he shall;” and Monteiro rang a bell which lay on the mantelshelf. It was answered by the man Pedro, to whose care Monteiro committed Chifferil, who parted from his host with a curious mixture of nervousness and cordiality.

As soon as he was alone Monteiro drew near the fire and stood in deep thought, while a soft dreamy expression relaxed the tension of his bold bronzed face. Then, again replenishing his glass, and murmuring, “To her sweet eyes,” drained it. As he set down the glass old Robilliard entered.

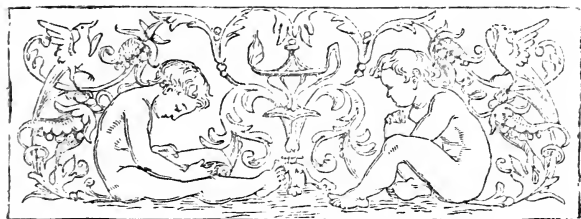
“You are alone, Excellency? Yon little parched herring stayed long—what is he?”

“A man who is useful to me now, Robilliard; and a better fellow than he looks. But have you kept the fellow I mentioned to you just now?”

“I have, sir; and he is an old friend who wants sore to speak with you—here he is.”

Robilliard stepped back as he spoke and opened the door, whereupon the tall gaunt old soldier before described, who claimed Mr. Nathaniel Morley's acquaintance, entered, bending his head as he passed the low doorway and then stood upright in the strong fire-light.

"D'Arcy!" exclaimed Monteiro, springing forward to clasp his hand. "D'Arcy, by all that's fortunate!"



## CHAPTER V.

**T**HE deep silent rage of John Langley, on finding that Maud had escaped, may be imagined. The antagonism of nature between them settled down on his side into a deep resentful hatred. He longed to have that slender delicate girl, who, in spite of her helplessness, defied and exasperated him, to torture and to oppress. But she had invoked a powerful protectress in the well-known Countess of Helmsford; and, after some reflection, the judicious Mr. Langley decided that his best game was to win over a woman he dared not attack. Could he get the Countess on his side, all would go smoothly. How he cursed

his own short-sightedness in refusing Maud's request, when they first came to town, that she should be permitted to visit Lady Helmsford. Had John Langley dreamed there was so much "go" in that frail soft-voiced girl, he would have assented, and secured the aunt's co-operation, from the vantage ground of disinterested regard for the orphan of his benefactor. But still, why should he not now succeed? His plans and avowed motives were just and reasonable; and if Lady Helmsford agreed to his proposition for the young orphan, all might go better than before Maud's flight. Every day that rolled over, without the discovery of that accursed "pardon," added to his security, though an unpleasant conviction, which he could not shake off, haunted him—a conviction that sooner or later it would appear to confound his plans. Having determined on his line of action, he called for his valet and his chair, and prepared to pay a state visit to the Countess of Helmsford.

He inquired for Captain Langley; but that gallant individual had not appeared since the previous morning. Living in his own

lodgings, he was only a visitor at his father's gloomy puritanical abode.

Chifferil had been summoned at an unusually early hour to his mistress's presence the morning after his interview with Monteiro. She was walking up and down an apartment adjoining her dressing-room, where she usually dictated her letters, her *robe de chambre* of brocade sweeping behind her and being impatiently, yet not ungracefully, kicked when she turned in her restless pacing.

"Well, sir! what insolent vagary is this?" she exclaimed, as the culprit bowed low before her, and she paused, fixing her large black eyes with scornful indignation upon him. "How can you account for your absence last night?—an absence unknown to me."

"I most humbly crave your ladyship's pardon; but knowing that your ladyship seldom, nay, never requires my attendance after the hour for dressing, and feeling somewhat oppressed with an aching head, I sallied forth to seek refreshment by a short walk in the open air."

"Make your excuses shorter, sir. You

should have had your tale more pat. I do not want a volume. More like you sought a tavern to earn headache rather than to dissipate one."

"I admit, honoured madam, there is a measure of truth in your words; for, in my way, I met the Spanish gentleman who used to visit your ladyship in Paris, and he invited me to share a—a—cup of chocolate with him."

"Indeed!" said Lady Helmsford, the expression of her eye changing, though she resolutely kept her frown unmoved. "When I see the Don I shall tell him he must not meddle with the discipline of my household, nor teach my people to be as lax as himself; and," after a short pause, she went on, the tone of her voice softening, "see you do not trespass again. Now what news had Monsieur de Monteiro?"

"He gave me next to none, but was full of inquiries for your ladyship—hoped you had not quite forgotten him, and asked anxiously if I thought you would receive him. I did not venture reply positively, so he said he would do himself the honour of waiting upon you to-day or to-morrow—I can not remember which."

Lady Helmsford was silent for a few moments, gazing away into some imaginary distance, the lines of her face relaxing into unwonted softness.

“A distinguished stranger is always sure of a courteous reception at the hands of an English gentlewoman,” she said at length. “Come, Chifferil, to work—I have a letter of some importance to write to John Langley. I suppose the gossips of the house have informed you that Mistress Maud Langley, my niece, took refuge here last night? So I must communicate with her guardian. She is a foolish chit; even after her long story I do not see why she should fly her uncle because he wished to wed her to his son. I have seen the young gentleman, and he seems a pretty *cupidon* enough; besides, it is always difficult to arrange a marriage for a portionless girl. In short, I do not well understand this man Langley wishing the marriage.”

Chifferil smiled—a smile so preternaturally knowing, that his imperious mistress cried:

“What do you grin at, man? Speak out! What do you know?”

And partly from habitual obedience, partly

in consequence of his conversation with Monteiro, the secretary determined to speak.

“If a certain document could be found, madam, the young lady would have a splendid dowry ; and the prudent Master Langley no doubt knows this well.”

“How ! what do you mean ?” asked the Countess, opening her great eyes.

“Surely your ladyship must have heard the report current among certain friends of the house, that her late Majesty, shortly before her death, granted a full pardon to Lord Langdale ?”

“No. I have heard nothing of it,” said Lady Helmsford, sitting down on a small sofa or settee, and looking fixedly at Chifferil. “I hope, sir, you have no vile Jacobite associates, whereby you may compromise me ? How came you to hear such chatter ? and having heard, not to report it to me ?”

“It was among the people of the Marquise de Boisville, in Paris, that the rumour first reached me, and I would not dare to open a family matter with your ladyship, concluding you were better informed than myself,” added Chifferil, with becoming humility.



Lady Helmsford did not reply immediately. She sat playing with the ribbons of her *robe de chambre*, while a variety of complex considerations crowded her busy brain. This hint of Chifferil's came most opportunely. Here was a key to all that was enigmatical in John Langley's conduct. Her niece, then, was a prize, and would be useful in extending her own influence, and increasing her family connections, against the drear days, when, youth and charm and social success vanished, she should want such ties to uphold her. A bird's-eye view of the marriageable men of rank in England presented itself before her, and plan after plan flashed with lightning rapidity across the field of thought. At length rousing herself, she exclaimed, "Write, Chifferil," and began to dictate a letter to John Langley. It was a composition of some difficulty, and was altered and corrected over and over again. But all this painstaking was in vain, for just as the much-enduring secretary approached something like a successful termination, a footman announced that Mr. John Langley was below, and begged permission to see her ladyship.

“Yes, I will see him if he can wait a while.”

The servant retired ; and Lady Helmsford, taking the oft-corrected copy, slowly tore it into minute shreds, while she meditated what line she should adopt with the successful politician who awaited her. Then, having made up her mind, she rang for her maid and went to complete her half-finished and elaborate toilette.

The moments which intervened before the Countess appeared, formed a very uncomfortable half-hour to John Langley, as—sometimes pacing the grand and lofty saloon, sometimes resting uneasily in one of the velvet-covered fauteuils—he awaited the great lady’s coming. The sensitive selfishness of Langley’s nature made him peculiarly alive to the influence of his unfortunate birth. Occupying a perch as it were on the border-land between nobility and plebeianism, he felt the exaggerated pride of race natural to those who know they have an uncertain claim to the advantage of good birth ; while, on the other hand, his feelings were strongly coloured by an envious hatred of those whose legitimate rank placed them far above out of his

reach. Could he but preserve his son from the mortifications which had been his mental "daily bread"—his son, round whom centred all the human feeling of his narrow intense nature—by securing for him the family heritage, so that Langdale should continue in *his* line—he felt he would not have lived and lied and schemed in vain. John Langley was a man of some ability and fair culture. Indifferent as he was to the smaller graces of life, he could not avoid feeling the effect produced by the splendid aspect of Lady Helmsford's drawing-room. The mirrors and consoles, the rare china, the rich hangings, the delicate miniatures in their quaint frames, which lay upon some of the tables, the glow of mellow colour, the patrician tone which pervaded the atmosphere of the mansion—oppressed and irritated him: there he was on sufferance.

"Nevertheless they shall not have everything according to their fancy!" he thought. "Lord Langdale's will gives me legal power over Maud. It shall go hard if I do not carry out my designs."

The next moment a powdered footman threw open the double door, and Lady Helms-

ford sailed into the room in all the magnificence of her completed toilette. Her hair, lightly powdered and festooned with lace and ribbon, set off her rich complexion and large tragic black eyes; a sacque of violet silk, edged with costly white lace, fell from her stately sloping shoulders to the ground, over a skirt of pale-green satin brocaded in silver; a tight-fitting stomacher and capacious hoop concealed her decided tendency to embonpoint; and a pair of exquisitely-fitting, many-buttoned, cream-coloured gloves reached to where the elbow-ruffles of rich point finished her sleeves. She held a long fan with jewelled sticks; and a narrow band of black velvet, fastened with diamonds, clasped her throat. John Langley, accustomed as he had been to intercourse with great men, had seen little or nothing of great ladies, and felt surprised at the effect this gorgeous apparition produced upon him, especially as it is always part of a nature like his to hold women lightly as mere *addenda* to a man's state, or as stepping-stones to fortune, if *they* possess any.

As soon as Lady Helmsford reached the

first station (as an embroidered and gold tabouret might be considered) she executed an elaborate and profound curtsy with the practised ease which neither hoop nor sacque could embarrass. Whereupon John Langley performed a stiff though respectful bow.

With another curtsy, less elaborate than the last, and a haughty though not ungracious smile, Lady Helmsford said, while her visitor straightened himself from *his* second reverence, "I think, my good sir, I have had the pleasure of seeing you before."

"Your ladyship does me honour. I was once presented to you by Lord Langdale," he returned, remembering with some bitterness the scant favour with which he had been received.

"Draw near the fire," said the Countess condescendingly; "the weather is chill."

She swept past him as she spoke, and took her seat on a luxuriantly-cushioned settee with her back to the light, pointing with her fan, as she spoke, to an ottoman opposite.

"I have ventured to call upon your ladyship," began Langley in a grave harsh voice,

“because of the rash and unadvised action of my niece, Mistress Maud Langley, in quitting my protection—”

“And seeking mine,” interrupted Lady Helmsford, with another smile, her clear high-bred tones sounding as if they belonged to a world different from Langley’s. “Of course I expected to see you. Maud is a foolish vapourish little chit ; but what did you do to frighten her, good Master Langley ?”

“I cannot say, save to propose what few young women shrink from—a good husband.”

“The young lady,” returned Lady Helmsford, with slight emphasis, “said as much. Surely there must be other circumstances which offended her ?”

“None, madam ; none, upon my honour.”

“And you are her guardian, sir, I have been told.”

“Your ladyship is correctly informed ; my late brother appointed me her guardian.”

“Your brother ? O yes, to be sure. I had forgotten the relationship. Well then, Master Langley, what is the exact object of your visit ?”

“To remove my ward,” he returned roughly,

stung by the tone with which she spoke of his relationship.

“As you will,” said the Countess, shrugging her shoulders. “If,” again a gracious smile, “you think *I* am not a fit protectress. But do you not think she may slip from you again? This is a strange tale of her wedding. She had need be well looked to, or we know not what may happen. Pray, sir, what steps have you taken to free my niece, *your* ward, from this extraordinary and unpleasant entanglement?”

Lady Helmsford's manner at once nettled Langley, and put him in a difficulty. The mysterious marriage was exactly what he did not want to make a noise about. What might come out of a legal process respecting it Heaven alone could tell. So, after an instant's hesitation, and keeping his eyes on the carpet, he replied :

“None, madam. It is a matter so difficult and unpleasant that, on consultation with my lawyer, I resolved that the best way to save talk and exposure would be to carry out the intended marriage with my son. Then, if the adventurer who personated him dared to

claim the lady, there would be a real and consummated marriage to protect her against a false one."

"There is some reason in what you say ; but I think the young lady's objections would nullify the plan. What did your son do to offend her ? for she had consented to be his wife."

"Nothing, madam, nothing ; 'tis nothing but a weak girl's whim that causes all this confusion and mars her own fortune."

"I am sure, Master Langley," returned the Countess, with a faint tinge of contempt in her accent, "I care not to embroil myself in her squabbles with you. You are welcome to take her back for me. 'Tis a pity you did not come for counsel to *me* in the first place ; nor can I help wishing you well out of this curious piece of chicanery—this marriage. By the way, my good sir, how is it that you, a prudent man as you seem to be, wish to wed your young son to a penniless girl, however high born—one with a tainted name too ?"

"I am as sincere an adherent of the House of Hanover as your ladyship," replied John



Langley slowly, "still I cannot consider the name of Langley tainted, because the last legitimate owner of it lost himself by a mistaken devotion to a wrong cause. As to the rest, I am under deep obligations to the late lord ; the least I can do is to provide for his daughter in the best and most suitable manner, and that is to give her for a husband my own son, who is not contemptible either in person or fortune, for I have ever been a prudent and a saving man."

"I do not doubt it, my good Master Langley," returned the Countess, with the same insufferable tinge of condescension which pervaded her tone unconsciously to herself all through the interview. She intended to be most genial and charming, concluding that a man occupying John Langley's debatable position would be ready to give solid pudding in exchange for what crumbs of politeness *she* thought fit to let fall from her lofty table. She slightly mistook the character she had to deal with. "Indeed, this mingling of prudence and disinterestedness is rare ; and though I have no special call to care for the daughter of Lord Langdale, she is nevertheless

my kinswoman, and I shall be pleased to have her honourably provided for without cost to myself. How strange is fortune, sir," continued the Countess, putting her head to one side, with a fascinating smile and graceful air of contemplation. "Were my niece now in the position of which her father's folly robbed her, we should all be fighting for the guardianship of so rich an heiress."

"But as she is not," replied Langley, with a quiet gravity which masked the cynicism of his speech, "your ladyship is quite willing to hand over the charge of her provision to me?"

The Countess laughed a refined, but slightly scornful laugh.

"Precisely so, my good sir. Just think now, even if her late Majesty had been spared from the realms above for a few months longer, no doubt my lord's many friends might have persuaded her to some act of clemency, that would have reversed the present state of affairs. What an unreasonable tyrant is death!"

"True, madam; but one we should be ever prepared to meet," said Langley solemnly;

while he thought, "What does this accursed woman know or suspect?"

"No one can look on you, excellent Master Langley, and doubt your preparation at all points," returned her ladyship, with a complimentary inclination of the head; while she reflected, "How cleverly the dog hides his knowledge *if* he has any!"

"Then madam, am I at liberty to remove my ward?"

"Nay, nay; you take me too literally. I am not so miserly as to throw all charges on you, most prudent and generous sir. Would it not be better for Mistress Langley to remain with me than under the roof of a gay bachelor—widower, I mean—like yourself, especially pending the measures which you must take in the Ecclesiastical Court to sweep away this embarrassing cobweb of a marriage? You really must! We of the higher orders cannot afford to slight these oppressive iron bands which hold our somewhat tottering society together."

"Madam," began Langley, and paused a little embarrassed to choose his words. If the Countess really meant to make common

cause with him, it was a great gain ; if not, would it any more be wise to show distrust ?

“Oh, I shall listen to no objections, Master Langley,” continued Lady Helmsford. “You must repair your error in not first seeking me. The young lady shall remain in my house ; and your pretty *polisson* of a son shall visit his *fiancée* here as often as he likes ; and, finally, let the marriage take place in *my* house, under *my* sanction,” she concluded, with slight but perceptible emphasis.

Langley, in spite of distrust and dislike, was almost caught by this tempting offer.

“Your ladyship’s countenance and sanction are of high advantage,” he said slowly. “But my ward’s circumstances are so peculiar that I almost fear to trust her out of my sight ; for her own sake, madam, for her own sake ! So bold and dexterous a ruffian as he who personated my son might snap her up the first moment she was alone. I would fain—”

“How, sir, can you think she would not be safe, surrounded by my household, sheltered by my protection ?” asked Lady Helmsford haughtily.

“She is safe nowhere till my son can claim

a husband's rights," returned John Langley abruptly and sternly.

"Now can you form no conjecture who this bold schemer is?" asked Lady Helmsford, drawing her fan through one hand after the other, curiosity quenching dignity for the moment.

"None, madam; none!" said Langley shortly.

"Trust me, 'tis some fool who fancies her an heiress!" exclaimed the Countess, her head again to one side, and her great eyes fixed searchingly, yet mockingly, on him. "But if so, why did he not carry her away?"

"Ay, there is the marvel," said Langley somewhat uneasily. "I myself believe that such had been his intention; but the means somehow or other failing, he executed but half his scheme."

"Come now, Master Langley, think you not 'twas some old lover from France? What can you know of the young lady's life there?"

"I but know she was most carefully trained by Madame Wandesforde, the widow of one of the men who fought against King William at

the Boyne ; and though her husband was rebellious, *she* herself came of a godly Presbyterian stock ; so your ladyship's niece has been staidly and prudently brought up."

"Poor child !" said Lady Helmsford, with contemptuous pity. "Nevertheless, my friend, lovers are subtle things, and will sometimes slip in through prudence and care and godliness ; and the girl is fair."

"She may be so," said Langley indifferently. "I think of nought save what is due to her father's daughter."

"Well, well, Master Langley, I am not able to give you much longer time. How will you decide ? Will you leave your ward under my care ? You can reclaim her when you will ; and Captain Langley shall have due access, and be enabled to press his suit under *my* sanction. Let me see : the day after to-morrow will be Thursday. Yes, on Thursday I receive in the evening. Let him present himself ; and, trust me, your ward shall run no risk while with me."

John Langley hesitated yet a moment. It was a tempting offer, and Harold would be radiant with satisfaction at the invitation his

father was authorised to convey to him. This thought outweighed the curious mixture of distrust and enmity which the handsome condescending Countess inspired, and he said :

“The offer of your ladyship’s sanction is too valuable to be refused. I will e’en trust my niece to your good care ; reserving to myself the right to resume the guardianship of her person when it seems necessary.”

“Of course, of course,” said the Countess airily, with a wave of her half-open fan ; while she thought, “The low-bred Puritan ! he should have grasped the honour of my co-operation with both hands. Then we shall see the gallant Captain on Thursday evening,” she said aloud.

“He will hold himself highly honoured in obeying your ladyship’s commands.”

“And yourself, good Master Langley ?”

“These gay scenes are not for me,” said he grimly. “I am a worker too sombre to mix with summer flies.”

“Thank you, sir,” said the Countess, laughing.

“Meantime,” continued Langley, rising, “I will consult with my lawyer touching the late

ceremony, and let your ladyship know the result. I therefore"—bowing—"have the honour to salute you, and say good-morning."

Another stiff respectful bow, to which the Countess, also rising, performed a curtsy more expressive of her own grandeur than respect for her departed guest.

"I wish you a very good day, sir; and await your tidings."

As John Langley passed through the door a footman entered. "Don Juan di Monteiro," he said, "is awaiting your ladyship's permission to present himself."

"Indeed?" said the Countess, smiling radiantly. "You may admit him."

She turned eagerly to the glass as the man left the room, and hastily arranged the lappets of her delicate lace cap, and the position of the rose fastened among her rich dark curls over the left ear; and then stood ready to receive her visitor.





## CHAPTER VI.



**MEANWHILE** Maud Langley, little dreaming that she was a bone of contention among conflicting interests, enjoyed the first real repose she had tasted since she had left Langdale and the protection of the Rector's vicinity—a sense of relief which was fully shared by her faithful attendant.

A sumptuously-appointed bed-chamber and sitting-room had been assigned to them, but they had supped and breakfasted without any intimation that Lady Helmsford remembered she had guests. And now, the morning meal being some time past, Maud felt strange and unoccupied.

"I wonder my aunt has not visited or sent for me," said the young orphan pensively. "Certainly, Dorothy, it is marvellously peaceful to feel that we are no longer prisoners in John Langley's hands. Nevertheless I would my noble kinswoman had given us a warmer welcome." Maud hung her head dejectedly.

"Ay, my bird; and I wish too we had been able to bring a few of your clothes with us. A few! God knows the whole wardrobe is scant enough. Beyond a change of linen, I dared not cumber myself with aught. Now if my lady the Countess would just send her milliner and shoemaker, and all the rest of them, to fit you out as becomes your rank, and then present you to the King and get him to hear your story, he would give you your own again, I'll warrant, for all he is a Hanover rat."

"Hush, hush, dear Dorothy! we must remember my aunt's politics. Heaven knows I would gladly renounce wealth and rank if I could but win peace and safety and a home. Still it is hard to lose one's own, because my dear father was loyal and true. The Queen might have forgiven him his faithfulness to

her father. Ah, Dorothy, what a desolate year the last has been !”

“ Ay, that it has, sweet lamb. But you will win through yet, and find a brave good husband. Ah, I wish I saw you safe and free from that—that good-for-naught who betrayed you into a mock marriage. No one knows when he may turn up and give no end of trouble.” Dorothy lapsed into meditation, thoughtfully rolling up the corner of her apron with her strong bony hands.

“ Of course it is frightful to be married to—one knows not whom. But at least the unknown has saved me from Harold. Oh, Dorothy, what weakness and despair could ever have driven me to consent to wedding him? I cannot tell what revulsion of the soul has turned me so bitterly against Harold. Oh ! I blush for my own impatience, the want of fortitude that bent me to John Langley’s purpose. I would prefer death now to such a union. Yes, I *am* grateful to that stranger. Trust me, Dorothy, he will come and deliver me yet—there was truth in his eyes.”

“ Truth, good Lord ! there is little truth anywhere,” returned Dorothy, with a porten-

tous frown and shake of the head. Then, as though absorbed in a more important matter, she exclaimed, more to herself than to her young mistress, "I am rarely ill off for clothes—and *how* my lady's woman dresses. Even for the sake of this dear lamb I would like to ruffle it with the best of them. Let me see!" plunging her hand and arm up to the elbow into a profound pocket, and fishing up a small leather bag, she emptied the contents into her lap—a large and a small gold piece, and sundry silver coins. "Good lack! that's all our fortune; and even this we would not have but for yon impostor. I am nigh ashamed—"

A tap at the door interrupted her. On permission being given a small and rather fantastically-attired woman entered. Her morning robe of gay-coloured chintz was drawn through the pocket-holes with studied negligence, so as to display a red quilted petticoat beneath. Her angular and dark-skinned face was brilliant with rouge and profusely decorated with patches, its naturally nervous anxious expression carefully subdued into a languishing simpering air. Her pepper-

and-salt-coloured hair was turned back over a small cushion, above which a tiny lace cap was tied with green ribbon, and a large red bow was perched coquettishly over one ear. Curtsying low, she rose gracefully and stood with the toe of her red-heeled shoe pointed accurately in the fifth position. Maud rose to receive her.

“Suffer me to present myself,” she said, with an affected lisp. “Mistress Letitia Sparrow, *dame de compagnie* to the Countess of Helmsford.”

“I am happy to make your acquaintance,” replied Maud, returning her curtsy with the punctilious politeness of the period, a movement which elicited another, even deeper than the first, from Mistress Letitia.

“The Countess desires her love and compliments, and hopes you rested well. She would have been to visit you earlier had she not been occupied by business concerning yourself, and she is now detained by a foreigner of distinction. After his departure she will come hither and herself inform you of her interview with Master John Langley.”

“I shall be truly glad to see her,” replied

Maud, feeling a sudden sense of comfort at this indication of friendliness on the part of her aunt. "Will you not sit down?" she added, motioning her new acquaintance to a chair.

"With your kind permission I will, for I am further charged by the Countess to inquire if you were able to remove your wardrobe; and, if not, whether you wish the assistance of her people to replenish it?"

"I should indeed," said Maud, smiling and blushing, "for save some trifles my good Dorothy managed to put in her pocket, I have nothing beyond the dress I wear."

"Great powers!" cried the *dame de compagnie*, evidently and pleasurably excited, "what destitution for a young lady of your rank! But my lady the Countess will supply your every want; you are indeed fortunate to have such a protectress. Dear, dear! there are mountains of business before us—to say nothing of lingerie and lace, the choice of robes and flowers is a serious matter. Though indeed," to Dorothy, who stood by in grim silence, "Mistress Langley's exquisite and varying complexion will greatly lessen

our difficulties. Ah, dear lady, I can well see by the elegance of your carriage and address that you have resided in the polished capital of France. I love that noble nation for the sake of one justly dear to this widowed heart." With a due regard to her rouge, Mistress Sparrow put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Indeed," said Maud, with polite attention.

"But at present I must attend to the affairs of real life," resumed the companion. "On Thursday evening the Countess holds her weekly reception, and it is her wish that you should appear. You must therefore at once decide on your costume and have it put in hands. I have myself something of taste. Let me then suggest a pea-green robe of taffetas, corded with crimson, over a white satin petticoat, garnished with Mechlin lace and damask-roses. Methinks your beauteous tint and delicate colour would thus enhance themselves sevenfold."

An inarticulate growl of utter disapprobation issued from the half-opened lips of Dorothy ; and Maud hastened to reply, " You are most

obliging, but as yet I wear slight mourning, and I should not like to choose without my aunt's approval."

"But the time, dear lady, the precious time," interrupted Mistress Letitia, almost starting from her chair with eagerness. "The dressmaker waits without with a goodly pile of patterns."

"Let her enter then; I can choose one or two, and submit them to Lady Helmsford."

Whereupon the companion stepped quickly to the door, and beckoning to some one outside returned, followed by a staid-looking woman bearing a box, which, after a general curtsy, she placed upon a table and opened.

Maud was too young and had fasted too long from vanities of all kinds not to be enchanted and occupied by the array spread before her. Rich brocades, delicate taffetas, bright chintzes, silks of every shade; while Mistress Sparrow, revelling in her occupation, suggested and chattered, and held first one shade and then another against Maud's cheek with surprising energy and volubility. Even Dorothy was carried away by the excitement



of the moment, and so absorbed were the whole party that the Countess entered unperceived. She looked more stately and brilliant in her completed toilette than before. Moreover there was a light in her eyes, a lurking smile upon her lips, which bespoke a softer and more tractable mood than was common with her. She stood silent a moment, looking fixedly at Maud, whose delicate profile was distinct against the light of the window near which she stood.

“Good-morrow, niece,” she said at length in kindlier tones than Maud had yet heard from her lips ; at which, nevertheless, Mistress Letitia Sparrow started as though she had been caught in some delinquency ; and Maud, colouring with anxiety, made a movement as if to kiss the hand held out by her haughty kinswoman, but Lady Helmsford checked her, and pressed her lips an instant to her niece’s brow.

“I could not come before,” she said quickly. “And now, what have you done ? there is no time to lose.”

Seating herself, she rapidly turned over the pile of patterns.

“What may be your own fancy, Maud? Your name is Maud—is it not?”

“Yes, madam,” she replied, longing with almost sickening anxiety to hear of Lady Helmsford’s interview with Langley, yet not daring to ask. “It seems to me this grey-and-silver brocade is pretty, though I fear costly.”

“It is pretty, child, and will suit you well. Come,” to the dressmaker, “take this young lady’s measure. Cut the corsage low, and do not spare your lace. Let the petticoat be white silk with wild roses and silver leaves dewdropped, for garniture.”

The milliner curtsied low, and interrupted now and then by sharp shrewd suggestions from the Countess, soon measured the slender proportions of the fair *débutante*; then, as if knowing the tendencies of her employer, she hastily gathered her belongings together, and with another low reverence departed.

“If I might be suffered to suggest,” began the companion in mincing tones, but was immediately and relentlessly cut short by her mistress, who exclaimed :

“There, there, Sparrow, do not chatter.

Leave us ; I wish to speak to my niece alone."

Mistress Sparrow immediately obeyed, and Dorothy was slowly following, when Maud cried :

"Let her stay, dear aunt ; she has long been my only friend—my only comfort ; and I keep nothing from her."

The Countess nodded.

"She seems safe, and 'tis immaterial at all events ; but my companion is a chatterbox—an ape, yet useful in some ways. Now hear what I have done on your behalf to-day."

Maud clasped her hands in eager anxiety.

"I have had an interview with Master Langley," continued the Countess, "and it took all my skill to arrange matters with him. He has no doubt, under your father's will, a right to the guardianship of your person and property (had you any). Moreover he has powerful patrons to back him up. He is evidently a useful tool to my Lord Berkeley—and greater men still—nor is he unknown to the King himself. Of course, if he chose to enforce his rights, I could not resist. I therefore treated him with friendly frankness;

told him it was scarce fit for a young demoiselle to be alone under the roof of so gay a widower as himself; offered to receive the gallant officer, his son, as often as he wished to visit his charming *fiancée*; and insinuated, without committing myself, that the wedding might take place with more propriety and *éclat* under my auspices than his. All of which I could see pleased while it embarrassed him."

"Wedding!" repeated poor Maud in a despairing voice. "Alas, dear aunt, I have had enough of weddings. Ah! for mercy's sake do not sacrifice me to Harold Langley."

"Pooh, child!" returned the Countess, with a sort of contemptuous good-humour. "Do you think I should like my niece's husband to carry the bar sinister on his scutcheon? I have other designs, but it would not do to display them to Master Langley. Then this strange mock marriage of yours! We discussed that, and it is evident to me Langley has some fears connected with it; for when I wished it to be openly and legally dealt with and set aside, he hesitated, and was for hastening your marriage with his son; then

leaving it to your mysterious bridegroom to urge the claim he could not uphold. There is a mystery in all this, but I think I have a key to the puzzle, and my next step shall be to free you from the shackles of this ceremony, slight as they are."

"I know not what you will think, my honoured aunt," replied Maud, colouring and looking down; "but I am in no great haste to free myself. If it is a shackle, it is also a protection, and seems to shield me from Harold."

"Good Heavens!" cried Lady Helmsford, frowning angrily, "you have not formed any ridiculous fanciful attachment to the adventurer who substituted himself for Captain Langley? Speak; describe him."

"Indeed, I have no such fancy, madam," said the fair girl, with a sweet frank laugh. "Yet I confess there was something in the gentleman's eyes that drew me to him—a clear truthfulness, like the expression of my dear father; and this is all I can tell of his looks. I should not know him were we to meet, unless indeed he bent over me and I saw but his eyes, *as I did that day*. Moreover,

madam, he asked me to have patience and keep faith with him ; so, looking on him as a deliverer, I would fain wait a little time longer, for I cannot but believe he will reappear to set me free."

"Do not talk such childish nonsense to me," said the Countess sternly. "He is probably some Jacobite adventurer steeped in vice and crime ; and you must be watched most carefully lest he spirit you away, and then turn the knowledge he evidently possesses to his own benefit and your misery. If I give you protection I expect obedience."

The tears stood in Maud's blue eyes at the harsh and imperious tone assumed by her aunt, even while her naturally high spirit rose against it.

"I will obey you from love, not for fear or favour, dear aunt," she said steadily ; "but do I not also owe a duty to myself ?"

"Let us not split straws," said Lady Helmsford, struck by her niece's firmness. "I daresay we shall understand each other by-and-by. Meantime, if you trust me, I can secure you a brighter destiny than you dream of."

“Bright, alas !” cried the young orphan ; but tears checked her further utterance.

“Come, come ; I hate tears. Here, Betty, Susan—what is your name ? Look to your mistress ; see that she has all she needs. I have a thousand matters to attend to ; but we shall meet at dinner, Maud. Cheer up, child. Mind you look your best on Thursday. By the way, Master Langley will no doubt let you have your belongings if you send for them. Sparrow shall see to this ; they will be a convenience ;” and, touching her young niece’s brow lightly with her lips, Lady Helmsford swept away.

“Dear child !” cried Dorothy, approaching the weeping girl, who had thrown herself into a deep arm-chair as her aunt left the room. “Dry your tears ;” and she knelt beside her young mistress. “I doubt if I ever saw you in such grief even when we were John Langley’s prisoners. Now we are truly in far better case. My lady the Countess is right well disposed towards you, though a rare high and mighty dame. She will keep you safe enough I warrant, and not suffer

much interference. Come, dry your eyes, and see you win your aunt's heart."

"Think you she has one?" asked Maud, suddenly removing the handkerchief from her face, and trying to steady her voice. "I know not what to think; she attracts and repels me. I could love, were it not that I fear her. Yet why should I fear my mother's sister? Oh, shame! that I, a Langley, should fear anything. It is not death, dear Dorothy, but life, I fear. My aunt is noble and beautiful; but, oh!" with a shudder, "she could be cruel."

"Now you are vapourish, dear lamb. My lady treats you like a princess—sends John Langley tramping when he comes to claim you, and yet all the thanks she has is to be called cruel."

"Yes, I suppose I seem senseless; but I so hoped she might be a mother to me, and she has chilled and repulsed me. Nevertheless I will not be despondent; so fair a creature must have some heart, and I will strive to win her love. Why should she not love me, Dorothy?"

"Ay, indeed—why not? and she will, so



pluck up heart, my bird. And now I wonder if I might go with the messenger to Master Langley's house, and gather our things together?"

"Ring and ask," said Maud; "suppose we ask to see Mistress Letitia Sparrow?"

"Hum," returned Dorothy, with a contemptuous lifting of the upper lip, "she is a daft-like creature, but I suppose will serve our turn."

The bell was answered by an object that somewhat scared the good waiting-woman—a small negro boy of perhaps twelve, perhaps fifteen,—Dorothy was quite incapable of judging the age of what seemed to her an imp of darkness. Even Maud was a little startled by so unusual an apparition. He was fantastically attired in a striped crimson and yellow silk garment not unlike in shape to a modern blouse, girt round the waist by a gold-embroidered belt, and clasped with what looked like a gold clasp. His arms and legs were bare, save for anklets and armlets of rough massive gold; his feet were defended by a species of sandal, and his head covered by a small white turban.

A moment or two of surprised silence followed his appearance as he stood grinning from ear to ear—his ivory white teeth and glistening eyes giving additional uncanniness to his aspect.

“Bless us and save us! what’s this?” muttered Dorothy almost involuntarily.

“Hush,” said her mistress.

“Did missee ring?” exclaimed their strange visitor in a rather soft and pleasant voice. “I sink missee ring; leastways Massa Chifferil he say lady ring—run, Gomez, run; an’ I run. *Did missee ring?*”

This was gabbled with the utmost rapidity, and then the speaker drew in his breath with audible suction, though still grinning.

“I rang,” returned Maud, smiling, for she found it impossible to resist the contagion of his grins, or continuous grin; whereupon he burst into a loud chuckle, which he endeavoured to suppress by clapping his black paws over his mouth, “for all the world like a monkey that had learned to talk,” as Dorothy in after years described him. “I rang to ask if Mistress Sparrow is disengaged, and if she could spare me a few minutes of her time.”

“Missee Sparrow? O yes, I run find him. I know where ebery one is. I fetch Missee Sparrow in three two minutes, but missee will just not tell Massa Chiff I’s been in—don’t tee, now don’t tee?” and backing up this petition with a series of impish chuckles, he made a sudden bow so deep as to suggest total absence of backbone, and disappeared, closing the door with infinite precaution.

“Eh! my dear young lady, what a monster is this!” cried Dorothy, seizing her rough hair in both hands. “Has my lady pressed the devil and his imps into her service?”

“Do not be frightened,” returned Maud Langley. “I have heard that it is a fashion in England to have these black pages in great households—nay, they are adopted sometimes in France; and no doubt my aunt is behind in nothing that can add *éclat* to her establishment.”

“Bless us and save us!” began Dorothy, when the door again opened and the grave footman who had been “told off” to attend them entered and stood silently awaiting orders. Maud hastily signed to Dorothy to keep silence, and repeated her request to speak

with Mistress Sparrow, who obeyed the summons so quickly that Dorothy had scarce time to run through the gamut of astonishment when she arrived.

“Too glad to be of the smallest service to my lady’s charming relative,” she said, drawing in her head as if endeavouring to get her chin inside the collarette of lace folded round her throat, in reply to Maud’s apology for calling her. Having heard explained Dorothy’s wish to fetch the baggage herself from John Langley’s residence, and arranged that a couple of stout serving-men should escort Dorothy to protect and assist her, Mistress Letitia said, with her soberest air, “I fear me you have been somewhat startled by a strange visitor?”

“A little negro boy answered the bell,” replied Maud, who would not herself have broached the subject.

“Ah! I thought so—though he only laughed and turned head over heels when I asked him,” cried Letitia. “He is the veriest plague that ever entered a house, and that spoiled and indulged by my lady there’s no living with him.”

“And why, for pity’s sake, does her ladyship keep such a little monster and make so much of him?” asked Dorothy, with irrepressible curiosity.

“I pray you pardon my good Dorothy’s indiscretion,” said Maud prudently.

“La! my dear young lady,” returned Letitia, “there is no secret. The little mischief was given to my lady in Paris by a gentleman—he, he, he!—a gentleman who was quite the mode in Paris; all the great ladies were dying for love of him, though none knew rightly what he was. He was indeed a splendid personage, though it was said, or rather whispered, that he was a desperado, a buccaneer from the Spanish main, but the great ladies liked him all the better. Now our noble Countess was one of the most splendid, if not *the* most splendid, of the visitors in Paris last November; but one lady, the Marquise de Boisville, surpassed her in one point. She had a negro, a tall fellow dressed like Bluebeard, besides all the usual lackeys, and my lady could not bear it, for this great dame was madly in love with the Spanish gentleman I have described to you,

but he affected my lady more than any one else." The companion said this as though it was a matter of personal pride. "And one morning, after they had been at a masqued ball together, he sent her this little fellow, dressed as you see him, in a chair, with a note in which he said that he wished to see his adorable lady as surpassing in equipage as she was in grace and beauty. So, ever since, that imp has been first favourite with his mistress. She boxes him herself mayhap, but none else dare touch him; and from the first, because the creature was chill—'twas in November last she had him—she let him crouch by her fire, even when Don Juan di Monteiro was with her."

Maud Langley opened her deep-blue eyes wider and wider as Mistress Sparrow went on—something in the tale wounded and offended her, she scarce knew why.

"Thus he runs hither and thither at his own will," concluded the companion, "and is cursed with the most itching curiosity, but only half understanding what is said, he tries to see everything for himself. Now, my dear young lady, if your woman is ready, I will see

to her escort. It is not well to venture the length of Great Queen Street after dark."

Dorothy rose and put on her cloak and hood.

"I will return straight to keep you company, sweet lady," said Mistress Sparrow. So saying she minced out of the room, followed by Dorothy, who bestowed an expressive look and grimace on Maud as she followed.

Mistress Sparrow was as good as her word, and came back, more quickly than Maud anticipated, armed with an embroidery-frame, with which resting on her knee as a semblance of occupation, she proceeded to pour forth, in "one weak, washy, everlasting flow," a river of anecdotes and reminiscences and conjectures — general chatter — respecting her lady's life and conversation in Paris and elsewhere, and also that of her associates. Rambling as was the discourse, her listener gathered from it something of the characteristics of the world to which she was about to be introduced, nor did the glimpse afford her much edification.

Maud Langley's training and education had been curiously marbled by opposing influences.

When Lord Langdale first found himself an exile, widowed soon after his expatriation, crippled in means and too honest and simple to be much of a personage in the collection of plotters, more or less astute, which composed the Court of St. Germain's, his greatest difficulty was how to dispose of his little daughter when he was glad to eke out his reduced fortunes by accepting a commission from the great Louis.

It was therefore with the utmost gratitude he closed with an offer from the widow of an Irish officer (who had served James faithfully, and died of his wounds in France after the ruin of the Stuart cause in Ireland) to care for his child. Madame Wandesforde, as she was generally called, though deeply attached to her Jacobite husband, was not a little puritanical in the colour of her mind. She belonged to a family of presbyterian settlers, and her marriage had separated her from kith and kin. Peculiarly alone in France, liking neither the party with which she had become associated nor the country she was compelled to adopt, she attached herself with all the force of a strong grave nature to the little



girl committed to her charge. Under her silently watchful care Maud blossomed into womanhood.

Knowing little or nothing of the world around her, and assimilating her protectress's opinions, modified more or less by her own individuality, naturally bright and daring, full to the lips with life, loving, sensitive, it was perhaps fortunate that Maud's erratic impulsive disposition should have been calmed and regulated by the strict yet not unloving discipline of Madame Wandesforde's somewhat sombre routine. Nor was the heiress of Langdale uninstructed in those accomplishments and requirements suitable to a young lady of high degree. Indeed, her education was more than ordinarily solid and complete.

The retired life led by Madame Wandesforde and her charge permitted an amount of reading rare in those days, and few girls of *that* period were as familiar as Maud Langley with the noble poetry of Spenser and Milton. Thus a high if somewhat impossible standard was created in her imagination for the ideal hero round whom the fancies of the least fanciful girl gather. Warm and deep as had

been Madame Wandesforde's love for her husband, she ever repented the act of disobedience which had resulted in her marriage and her separation from her own people—an act to which she attributed all her subsequent misfortunes ; and no lesson was more strictly inculcated on her beloved pupil than obedience to a father's will. Maud Langley, at that undeveloped age when the kind Baron died, would have accepted almost any husband at her father's command. This training had been all in John Langley's favour when seeking to bring about the marriage with his son. It was the instinctive irresistible consciousness which grew upon her when Harold tried to play the lover's part, that dislike, nay, positive aversion, lurked under his seeming, that made her shrink with unspeakable dread from the idea of his ever possessing a husband's power and authority over her. The idea of some mystery which, unknown to her, had its nucleus in her simple self, completed the nervous terror which would have driven her into a brain fever, had she not found repose and partial deliverance in her aunt's mansion.

The occasional visits of her handsome, loving, genial father were indeed sunny spots in Maud's early existence. To go quite away with him, to visit some of his French and English friends, among the *grandes dames* of Paris, was indeed a treat not less enjoyed by the father, who, to speak truth, was somewhat in awe of his daughter's grave *gouvernante*. But by far the greater part of Maud's girlhood was spent in a corner of a partly decayed château near St. Germain's, where, by the kindness of its noble French owner, some of the humbler sufferers in the Stuart cause were permitted to shelter. Here, surrounded by evidences of poverty and dilapidation, her childhood glided into youth ; but the poverty was never sordid, and the dilapidation was picturesque. A vague perfume of patrician bygone grandeur hung about the noble desolate rooms and their scanty worm-eaten furniture, still it was home to Maud ; and, greatly to her advantage, the ample retired gardens, now a wilderness, permitted her more of free air and exercise than the young ladies of that age often enjoyed.

But the return of her father, ill with cold

and fever caught while serving with the troops of France against the Archduke Charles, brought the first grief to Maud which she had ever known. After a lingering illness, the thought and responsibility of which, as by a forcing process, matured her into sudden womanhood, Lord Langdale died ; and Maud, penniless and alone, returned to the solemn yet tender guardianship of her early friend ; nor was the routine of her life broken for many months, when John Langley made his appearance armed with the authority conferred upon him by her father's will, and then she was forced, despairingly, to bid farewell to all she had ever known of home and companionship. Madame Wandesforde was not so unfavourably impressed by Maud's kinsman as she was herself ; something in his grave puritanical air conciliated the one and repelled the other ; but it was a bitter blow to part with Maud, and no small unselfishness on the part of the lonely widow to let Dorothy accompany her to the unknown land whither she was going—Dorothy, who had been nurse, cook, lady's-maid, and butler so efficiently for nine long years.

However, fate and John Langley were inexorable, and poor Madame Wandesforde's sole consolation was the belief that Maud's future, respecting which she had had many uneasy thoughts, was provided for and secure.

Such had been the training and experience of our delicate Maud, who now sat listening with dim uneasy disapprobation to Mistress Sparrow's revelations of life as *she* knew it.



## CHAPTER VII.

**T**HE bitter weather of the last few days had somewhat relaxed, and a clear moon was shining on the grand new mansions which partially surrounded St. James's Square, rendering almost unnecessary the flaring smoky torches borne by the barefooted officious link-boys who pressed round the Helmsford residence as the fast-coming chairs and coaches announced the usual reception.

Within, the whole suite of rooms occupying the first floor were thrown open and lit up with manifold wax-lights—one room being well supplied with card-tables, while others were left free for the company to converse or circulate as seemed best to them.

Above, in her own chamber, with a species of fearful delight, Maud Langley essayed the dress duly presented to her at the right moment by the milliner's obsequious apprentice. Never before had the young orphan possessed such a garment. Dorothy, who was no contemptible hairdresser, had turned her nut-brown tresses in naturally-waved folds over a low cushion, and gathered them into a loose mass on her neck behind, all innocent of powder, as was the delicate pensive face, which so readily lit up into archness, of rouge or patches.

When the ceremony was completed, and the *débutante* fully attired, from her white-satin pointed high-heeled shoes with their silver rosettes, to her ivory and lace fan (one of her own few possessions), the sweep of her robe and the folds of her petticoat duly disposed, Dorothy and the dressmaker stood aside and contemplated their work, one with loud, the other with murmured, expressions of admiration.

"At last, my lamb—at last I see you clothed as your father's daughter ought to be," cried Dorothy.

"The young lady would lend grace to any garment," said the other.

Maud, smiling and blushing, glanced at her own image in the glass, and felt ashamed at the thrill of exultation sent through her veins by what she saw there.

"But now all is ready, what am I to do, Dorothy? I hear carriages driving up, but I dare not enter the *salon* alone, and I know not where to find the Countess."

"Mistress Sparrow," began Dorothy, when the door opened to admit that personage.

"Ah! you are ready—that is well," she exclaimed. "The Countess wishes you to be in the drawing-room in good time. Ah, my dear young lady, I protest you look like some priceless pearl! What exquisite taste! Yet I would opine that a thought more of colour now? Eh! but my lady has somewhat sombre taste; she will have me in this grave grey and black lace, which is somewhat antiquated for me, albeit I am not exactly *dans ma première jeunesse*. But how can I resist when her ladyship generously bestows the robe?"

Maud said with truth that she thought the



costume most becoming ; and certainly the companion looked many degrees better than in the fantastic garb of her own choosing.

“Let us descend then,” said Mistress Letitia.

She led the way, and Maud could not but admire the brilliant aspect of Lady Helmsford’s fine rooms. House and furniture were of the newest fashion. The chairs, lounges, and tabourets, framed in graceful sweeping curves of carved and gilded wood, or dark and highly-polished walnut and ebony, were covered with richly-worked silk and satin ; and though, to modern ideas, they might be too solid and weighty for convenience, they were light and airy compared to the constructions which preceded them thirty or forty years before. The carpets were mellow in tint and of Eastern manufacture ; and Indian cabinets, Venetian looking-glasses, rare china, feather screens, and rich hangings were mingled with splendid profusion among the more ordinary furniture. These well-garnished chambers began gradually to fill with a variegated company. Ladies in rich dresses of every hue ; courtly-looking men scarce less richly attired in velvets and brocades, peri-

wigged, powdered, perfumed, lace-ruffled—all moving and speaking with the trained stately grace and ease peculiar to that period, which somehow managed to produce so highly-polished a surface on so coarse a grain.

Maud forgot even her own shyness in the surprise and delight with which she gazed at the animated scene before her. The *dame de compagnie* had introduced her by a side-door into the smaller of the drawing-rooms thrown open that evening, and for some time she did not see her aunt, who was in the first room receiving her guests. Mistress Sparrow had suggested that they should place themselves opposite a wide double door, through which they could see the company arrive. Maud therefore seated herself on a chair, the carved and twisted back of which rose above her head, and beside a high ebony cabinet, which made an effective background to the delicate elegance and refined colouring of her form and dress. Mistress Letitia perched herself on a tabouret by her side, from which she frequently started in *staccato* style to perform deep curtsies to the various grand ladies who deigned to bend their heads in

acknowledgment as they passed. The gentlemen did not seem to recognise her, but both cast frequent curious glances at her companion, as the appearance of such a distinguished-looking stranger in a society where all were well known was an event.

“’Tis a gay scene,” said the companion, observing Maud’s riveted attention. “I can assure you there are no other receptions in town that approach so near the brilliancy of a Paris *salon*; but I daresay, fair Mistress Maud, you know these better than I do.”

“No indeed; I have ever been a recluse, and never before beheld so good a company. Surely the ladies are most lovely and the gentlemen noble-looking, though a trifle heavy. But I long to see Lady Helmsford—where is she?”

“Oh, she stays near the entrance somewhat longer than usual—he, he, he! In short we have had an agreeable surprise. The Spanish gentleman I mentioned to you, the splendid donor of that—that little black mischief, has suddenly reappeared, and no doubt my lady is pleased to offer him hospitality in her own country. Now I will tell you some of the

most celebrated people here. That tall elegant lady in blue and silver, with a diamond spray in her hair, that is the beautiful Lady B——. The Duke of Wharton and Lord Fitzmaurice have crossed swords for her sake. She looks somewhat sad to-night, but that may be accounted for; they say her present favourite, Sir Harry Wilmington, is so deep in debt and embarrassment of all kinds that he has fled—only last week. And there is Mrs. C——, and Lady M. W——,” etc.

The communicative Sparrow ran through a dozen names, male and female, ending with a gentleman in unusually simple attire—claret-coloured velvet, with no garniture save gold filigree buttons—handsome, jovial, and resolute-looking, although his face was round and rubicund; and though well and stoutly made, he was perhaps too short and thick for dignity.

“There,” whispered Mistress Letitia, “look at that somewhat country-looking gentleman in a tie wig, that is one of the celebrities; that is Mr. Walpole. My lady has the highest opinion of his wits and parts; she says he can *buy* and *sell* all his opponents. We have but

a scant supply of remarkable men to-night. Do you know, that sometimes the great Mr. Pope, from Twickenham, honours her ladyship ; and many others I could name."

Maud listened and looked with amused interest till a group presented itself which set her heart beating and brought the blood to her cheek in a quick ebb and flow, leaving it finally colourless.

Lady Helmsford advanced into the centre of the large outer drawing-room with her usual haughty grace, slowly waving her fan, as she turned her head slightly from side to side, as if equally dividing her attention between her attendants. On her left hand was a tall, slight, and foreign-looking man, his dress contrasting strongly with the gorgeous colouring around him. It was entirely black velvet, -unrelieved by anything save a costly cravatte and ruffles of point d'Espagne, diamond shoe and knee buckles, and a dazzling solitaire among the folds of his lace cravatte ; his own dark, nearly black, hair was brushed back in loose waved curls, and gathered into a natural *queue* by a large bow of black ribbon ; his embroidered handkerchief was

drawn through his diamond sword-hilt, on which he rested his left hand lightly. There was an indescribable audacious grace, if such a combination can be imagined, about this gentleman's aspect and carriage, that struck all who looked upon him ; something in the guarded yet daring expression of the eye, the bronzed complexion, the free step that bespoke a life far different from the finikin fine gentlemen by whom he was surrounded.

But striking as his appearance seemed to all else, Maud Langley hardly saw him, her attention was riveted on the figure at her aunt's left hand. It was her half-dreaded half-despised cousin Harold, radiant in an amber satin brocade coat, plentifully laced with gold ; his enormous cuffs, deep waistcoat, red-heeled shoes all in the very highest fashion. He too ventured to wear his own fair hair, but it was powdered and curled most elaborately, and beneath it his hard, pallid, but well-featured face and cold blue eyes looked out on the world with a strain of contempt under his self-satisfaction.

"I bring you Captain Langley," said the Countess to her niece, "and cannot doubt

but that you will be well pleased to receive the gentleman ;” and the Countess turned to listen to what the other cavalier was saying, and which was spoken with much earnestness and an air of devotion.

Maud rose to receive Harold with punctilious politeness, which she intended should mark the distance to be observed between them ; but, fluttered by the sudden though not unexpected encounter, she dropped her fan. The gentleman in black velvet, who had not seemed to glance in her direction, but to be absorbed in his brilliant hostess, started forward and caught up the fan ; bending low, he presented it without raising his eyes to Maud’s ; and, returning to his place by Lady Helmsford’s side, finished his interrupted sentence. All was done with such rapidity that Maud had no time even to think of any suitable phrase in which to reply to her aunt, who, followed by the stranger, moved away without further remark.

“Do not leave me,” whispered Maud eagerly to Mistress Letitia, as Harold, with a profound bow, addressed her.

“I can scarce express to you, my most ador-

able cousin, the delight with which I recognise your native beauty and elegance, so suddenly developed by the fine taste of my Lady Helmsford. Zounds, madam! my father and myself were crazed to oppose your desire to be with your noble kinswoman, but you must well know it was but a natural jealousy that made me wish to keep a beautiful flower for my own eye alone."

"My word! the gentleman speaks elegantly," murmured the companion.

"Indeed, sir," said Maud, with a smile and a slight scorn of manner that became her well, "I know nothing of the kind. However, I am content to receive you as a kinsman."

"Alas! and is that all? but I shall venture to hope that when time proves me to be not quite unworthy your regard, I may be able to efface the impression of that fatal day." He stopped abruptly, a look of fierce anger for a moment replacing the carefully set expression of his features.

"I pray you, Captain Langley, do not recall such unhappy memories. I was grieved for your sake."



“Sweet obligingness, amiable condescension,” returned the gallant Captain ; but there was a bitter sneer on his lips, even while he softened his voice to its sweetest tone. However, he wisely adopted his *fiancée’s* hint, and talked no longer on personal topics ; but as Maud could not be drawn into more than monosyllabic replies, Captain Langley was obliged to include the *dame de compagnie* in his conversation, and so held forth in the most approved fashionable slang, respecting drums, routs, ridottos, actresses, great ladies, and “Bold Bucks,” who were then the terror and admiration of the town under the leadership of the celebrated Duke of Wharton—much to the admiration of Mistress Sparrow, and the bewilderment and weariness of Maud.

At last the companion proposed that they should adjourn to the card-room, that Mistress Langley might see the whole suite. The movement was a relief to Maud, although Captain Langley constituted himself their attendant, as if determined to display himself as an accepted suitor ; but Lady Helmsford came to the rescue. At the entrance of the card-

room, where numerous tables were occupied by parties at whist, basset, and piquet, she met the trio, and, with a quick glance at Maud's pale downcast face, said :

"I was coming to seek you, Captain Langley. Her Grace of D—— wants a partner at whist. I told her I felt sure Captain Langley of the Guards played a good game. You must verify my words, gallant sir. My niece will excuse you—give me your arm."

Harold was by no means sorry to be released from his ungracious task of playing the lover to so unreciprocal a partner, especially to sit *vis-à-vis* to a Duchess for an hour or more, although she was neither young nor beautiful.

"You have done penance enough, child," whispered Lady Helmsford, laughing as Maud's face visibly brightened. "Go, Sparrow, get her some tea. There are two or three very pretty fellows asking to be presented to you, but I do not see them now." She nodded and passed on.

"Exactly so, dear young lady, let us have a dish of tea, I am faint for want of some," cried Mistress Letitia, and she proceeded, not

without many checks, for the rooms were now crowded, to win her own and Maud's way to an outer saloon, where at one side, on a long beaufet, was set forth tea and coffee, and rich cakes, buttered and sweet.

Here, amid the footmen who attended under the direction of a stately butler, flitted in and out, armed with a huge silver cake-basket, the little black page who had so startled Maud and her waiting-woman the day before. The rich and varied scene, the all-pervading buzz of universal talk, the picturesque groups of ladies and their cavaliers, more or less absorbed in each other, with here and there a knot of sober elderly men, evidently deep in political discussion, and a sprinkling of bitter-looking dowagers, who, from the animation of their talk, were no doubt reviving some unfortunate character to rags,—all was so new and strange to our fair recluse that for a while she forgot her dread of Harold and his father, and looked on infinitely amused while she sipped her coffee, unable to refrain from laughing as she watched the little gaily-caparisoned negro flit here and there, twining round hoops and ducking

under gentlemen's arms, every now and then refreshing himself by a large slice of cake, putting his little black paw in among the delicate cakes deliberately and unblushingly, without an attempt at concealment.

"Why," she asked when he approached with a sort of bow to offer her his basket, "how darest thou devour these good things without leave?" She spoke instinctively in French, but the little fellow only grinned, showing a double row of the whitest teeth, and shook his woolly pate.

"You speak no French then?" continued Maud, who felt a sort of compassionate curiosity towards this strange specimen of humanity.

"No, missee, no; I'se speak English and Spanish."

"What would your lady say if she saw you eating the cakes?"

"Miladi laugh! miladi give me lots of cakes—heaps," raising his hand to show the height of the imaginary heap. "Miladi very good to Gomez, so Missee Belville and Missee Sparrow they so mad;" and again he grinned delightedly.

“La! I wonder, my dear young lady, how you can care to talk to a creature like that! You surely cannot set a value on him?” cried Mistress Letitia.

“Indeed he interests me, poor little fellow,” returned Maud, gazing at him as she sipped her coffee. “It seems that he has no friend save Lady Helmsford; and then he is human, and feels and suffers like ourselves, though I can scarce think it of the little black outlandish creature.”

Here Gomez, who had been looking with profound attention at the speaker, suddenly broke into a laugh, as if he understood and was considerably amused by the drift of the speech.

“Me not black nigger, missee—me brown. Sambo black nigger; me am Gomez, not *quite* black.”

Maud smiled and coloured; she was peculiarly sensitive for the age she lived in, and shrank from the idea of wounding even the humblest of God’s creatures.

“No, no, you are, as you say, brown. Will you take my cup, little boy?”

“Ay, ay, missee, and I’se come back again.”

“Did you ever hear the like?” cried Mistress Sparrow, drawing herself up; “the creature talks as if he was your brother.”

Maud laughed.

“If these poor blacks are men—and we must suppose they are—why, according to very high authority, they are our brothers.”

Mistress Sparrow raised her hands and eyes in astonishment at such mental eccentricity; but Gomez seeing fit at that moment to cut a species of caper, he upset not only the cake-basket but the coffee-cup, in which sufficient remained to make a hopeless stain on the skirt of her handsome sober slate-grey silk.

“Now I know that was wilful—I know it,” almost whimpered the poor companion, whose wrath was more apt to dissolve in tears than explode in objurgations. “One never knows when he understands or when he does not, wicked imp! I shall have rare work to remove this stain.”

“See, he is sorry,” said Maud, pointing with her fan to the little fellow, who had covered his face with his hands, and rocked himself to and fro.

“Sorry!” cried Mistress Letitia indignantly;

and as she said it Gomez removed his hands, revealing his face illumined with delighted mirth.

Though vexed for poor Letitia's sake, Maud could not repress a sympathetic smile ; whereupon the little fellow assumed a graver aspect, and turned to gather up the pieces of cake which lay scattered about. In so doing, he trod on the sacque of the lady who had been pointed out to Maud as a celebrated beauty. She was sipping her dish of tea and talking to the dark foreign-looking gentleman to whom the Countess had shown such marked attention. He immediately seized the offender by the shoulder, addressing him in a foreign tongue, which was not French. Maud could not help being greatly impressed by the complete change in Gomez's look and manner : an expression of the profoundest reverence and also of joy suddenly stilled his face ; he clasped his hands together as if in prayer, and his countenance fell as the gentleman continued evidently to rebuke him in his deep sonorous tones. They were not near enough to permit Maud to hear absolutely what passed, but she could see that the lady put

some questions in a languid disdainful manner; then other gentlemen came up to pay their court, and the stranger, quietly stepping back a pace or two, disentangled himself from the group, and, with an easy graceful bow, said in excellent English, though with a slight foreign accent:

“Have I not the honour of addressing the amiable Mistress Sparrow?”

“Why, yes, sir,” she returned, much flattered and fluttered by this address. “I could hardly have hoped that the modish Don di Monteiro would, among the variety of his acquaintances, have remembered a humble individual like myself.”

This then was her aunt's famous favourite, on whose gay doings and doubtful antecedents Mistress Letitia had so enlarged. Maud turned her eyes upon him with some interest, but he was at that moment bowing in acknowledgment of the carefully-executed curtsy with which Mistress Letitia accompanied her speech, so did not meet them.

“You undervalue yourself, madam. I fear that small offender has done you an injury. My Lady Helmsford does not rule him suffi-



ciently. A rope's end—I mean a flogging now and then—would be well bestowed; as it is, he has lost his head.”

“You are right, sir; the mischief he has done is not to be told; and here is my lady's niece ready to spoil him too—was quite upset lest she had offended his darkness by calling him black forsooth.”

“Nay, dear Mistress Sparrow, you speak somewhat strongly,” said Maud, blushing, and in her shyness slightly turning her head to avoid the eyes bent upon her—a movement of which Monteiro took advantage to gaze at her figure and profile for a couple of instants, as if his soul was in his eyes, yet was there nothing in the look that could offend; rather a thoughtful gravity.

“Mademoiselle need not blush for consideration bestowed on the wretched; it shows the true woman,” he said in fair French.

“Certes, the wretchedness of this little fellow is splendid,” replied Maud, charmed into animation by the sound of a language associated with past happy days, and delighted to speak it again.

“At present,” replied Monteiro; “but how

when his indulgent mistress wearies of him? When, how the grace of early youth gone, he changes from a toy to a mere lackey?"

"Ah! Monsieur does my aunt injustice. She could never consign what was once favoured to misery."

"You think so? you think so?" said the Spaniard, with a tone of amused surprise that somehow displeased Maud.

"I am sure," she said. "But I do not think the French tongue is familiar to Mistress Sparrow," she added, observing the state of uneasiness to which her companion was reduced by the continuance of a conversation she could not understand.

Mistress Letitia had, in truth, been strictly ordered by her imperious lady not to allow Maud out of her sight, or to exchange a word with any one of which she could not give account, for Lady Helmsford, judging Maud by the light of her own experience, had not quite divested her mind of suspicions respecting Maud's total innocence of the trick played upon Harold Langley.

"You are right," returned Monteiro, and continued in English, "how was it that I did

not meet you when I had the honour of knowing Lady Helmsford in Paris last—November, was it not, Madame ?” to Letitia.

“Yes, sir,” said that lady, much relieved to find herself able to share in the talk ; “but Mistress Langley had not joined us then.”

“Ah ! only just from fair France, I presume ?”

“Alas ! I have been nine weary months in this cold country.”

“Say rather noble country,” exclaimed Monteiro, looking keenly at her. “All men who love justice and liberty would fain be English.”

“I am sure, sir, you do us mighty honour,” cried Mistress Sparrow.

“Would you then be English ?” asked Maud.

“I am half-English in blood, whole English in heart.”

“Have I ever seen you in France with my father ?” asked Maud, with a dreamy puzzled look.

“Never, dear lady,” replied Monteiro quickly but kindly. “I have often heard of your noble father, but never had the

good fortune to know him. Wherefore, I pray?"

"Oh, I scarce know. I have met many cavaliers with my dear father that for a moment I—" she paused.

"I was not one of them, alas! and I have but lately come hither."

Further talk was prevented by the approach of Lady Helmsford, accompanied by a very elegant though elderly gentleman, elaborately attired in light-blue velvet laced with silver, who also wore a diamond solitaire and knee buckles, though less brilliant than those of the Spaniard.

"You here, Don Monteiro?" cried Lady Helmsford. "What have you done with your charming partner at ombre?"

"She found others more worthy her notice, and the excellent Madame Sparrow took pity on me."

Lady Helmsford laughed contemptuously.

"Here, Maud, is a gentleman who begs to be presented to you," said her ladyship carelessly. "My Lord Viscount Chedworth—my niece Mistress Langley. I fear me much you

will find but a shy recluse, my lord. Come, Don Juan, my guests are all employed. I will give you your revenge at piquet. Where was our last party, in Paris? I mean when you lost—”

“Ah, Madame! I lost all to you long ago,” exclaimed Monteiro, with a look of admiration, as he offered his hand to lead her to the card-room.

Mistress Sparrow could not resist giving Maud a little significant tap of her fan while my Lord Chedworth, with flowery circumlocution, was informing her that the grape was never so lovely or delicious as before the dew was evaporated by the glare of broad daylight. Long did the nobleman hold forth, as he had the highest opinion of his own eloquence, parts, and wit. To Maud he was simply a very funny long-winded old gentleman, to whom she nevertheless listened with a gentle deference due to his years, occasionally giving pointed answers, and unconsciously completing the conquest which her grace and distinguished appearance had begun.

“Is it not late? Might we not retire?” she whispered to Letitia.

“O no, not yet; I must speak with the Countess first.”

The companion knew better than to intrude upon her ladyship when engaged at play with the highly-favoured Don, so Maud had to endure my Lord Chedworth's compliments and assiduities for, what seemed to her, a long time. The rooms now began to thin, and Harold, released from his whist with a Duchess, came to perform his part as an accepted lover, the result of which was that Maud bestowed an amount of attention on her elderly admirer, which elevated him into a state of buoyant delight such as he had not known for years. Albeit her upbringing had been staid and severe, nature was too strong in Maud Langley not to derive a sense of amused enjoyment from seeing the bewilderment of her suitor, on finding that the prize he thought his own might possibly be sought by another. She remembered the careless hauteur of his advances at Langdale, when, unspeakably desolate and cast down, she would no doubt have responded to his addresses had he been tender and sympathetic. Now, somewhat giddy and elated by

the new scene into which she was plunged and the sort of adulation offered to her, she turned aside his fine speeches with a playful malice which, uncertain as he felt of his footing in that grand society, filled Harold's narrow mind with bitterest resentment.

At last even Maud's pertinacious attendants felt compelled to make profound bows and depart, for the company had all gone.

"Farewell for the present, my beautiful one," cried Harold, with insolent affectation.

"It would better become you, sir," returned Maud gravely, "not to use the possessive case."

"Why pretend to conceal what must soon be known?" exclaimed Harold.

"Methinks, sir," observed Lord Chedworth, "if the chance of so great a happiness is yours, you will best show your merit by religiously obeying the lightest wishes of the lady who honours you by expressing them."

"The advice of one whose experience must spread over a long period is of undoubted value," was the insolent rejoinder as Harold, with one more deep bow, turned sharply round and left the house.

“Forgive me, madam, but I could not refrain myself.”

“I have nothing to forgive, my lord,” said Maud. “My kinsman’s breeding is scarce thorough.”

Lord Chedworth opened his lips as if to speak, then checking himself, bade Maud and her companion a ceremonious good-night.

“Well, dear Mistress Langley,” cried the companion almost before he was out of hearing, “you *have* made a success to-night. Poor Lord Chedworth ! I was terrified for a moment lest Captain Langley would send him a *cartel*. His lordship is evidently quite fascinated. I am sure my lady ought to be quite pleased to find how worthy in every way—”

“Oh, dear Mistress Sparrow, say no more,” cried Maud, on whom the reaction of her unwonted excitement had already set in; “I know not what has possessed me this evening, but I fear I have been too bold, too talkative. Ah, if dear Madame Wandesforde were here what a lecture I should have ere I slept.”

“Well, it is time you were in bed now,” said Letitia, who had greatly enjoyed the



amount of attention reflected on her during the evening ; “ every one is gone. But I daresay you will find the Countess in the farther drawing-room ; if you bid her good-night you can retire.”

Maud was glad to obey, as she longed for silence and repose ; so, treading lightly, she passed through the deserted card-room, from which the servants were already removing the tables, and, entering the inner apartment, stopped short overwhelmed with confusion and a most painful sense of being utterly in the way. Lady Helmsford was seated in a large fauteuil, leaning against one side, in an attitude of languor and repose ; and a sort of low ottoman at her feet, reclined rather than sat Don Juan di Monteiro, apparently engrossed in the examination of the rings on her ladyship’s fair hand, which lay in his. It was impossible to retreat unseen, and Maud stood still, her face and throat dyed with the deep blush of shame and embarrassment.

It was but a moment, yet it seemed an age. A quick frown darkened Lady Helmsford’s brow as her eyes met Maud’s, but it was smoothed away in an instant.

“Come here, dear child,” she said in her sweetest voice and without moving, “you want to say good-night. Well, Monsieur, and do you think my ring as fine a brilliant as your own?”

Monteiro sprang quickly to his feet as she spoke, and stood aside with a look of annoyance; while Maud, scarce knowing what she did, came forward and received an ice-cold kiss upon her brow, returned a curtsy to Monteiro’s salute, and quickly retreated, all trembling and scared, to take refuge with Dorothy and darkness.

Half an hour after the Spanish stranger—last of all the guests to depart—was putting on his cloak and hat in the hall, when a side-door opened, and Chifferil, pale and worn-looking, came up to him.

“One word,” he said.

“I will come outside.”

They stood on the doorstep, safe from listeners.

“You have had my letters?” asked Chifferil eagerly.

“I have.”

“Is this not a strange and unpleasant

tale — of the marriage ?” continued the secretary.

“ Most strange ; it shows some deep plot. Chifferil, I believe you are an honest fellow. You must help me heart and hand to save this fair girl from the crafty designs that threaten her ; above all, from the impostor who will seek to force this mock marriage on her.”

“ I am indeed at your service for her sake. Has my lady said aught to you ?”

“ Of the marriage ? No. Now go in ; you will be observed. Keep me informed of everything, Chifferil—everything !”



## CHAPTER VIII.

“**W**HAT a wonderful world this is into which we have fallen or ascended, my Dorothy,” said Maud one morning a few days after the reception above described, as she laid aside a piece of embroidery on which she had been working for nearly an hour in unusual silence.

“Ay, it is honey,” returned Dorothy, who was diligently darning her own stockings in a cosy corner near the fire; “but ’tis a fine one, and you are among your own sort. I am sure we ought to be happy and contented, for we are well entertained.”

“Yet your voice sounds more like misery

than contentment," returned Maud, laughing as she walked to one of the windows which looked upon the square and drew back the curtains, for the morning was dull.

They were in the small sitting-room, into which their sleeping apartment opened, and where Maud's time was chiefly passed; for she found her aunt did not choose to have her companionship save when she sent for her—a state of ceremony which chilled poor Maud to the heart, yearning as she was to give and receive affection.

"Your voice bespoke neither happiness nor contentment," she repeated as Dorothy kept silence. "Come, dear nurse, as I used to call you, open your heart to me. I have seen a gloom in your eyes all yesterday; what is it?"

"Well," said Dorothy, drawing the stocking on which she was engaged somewhat vehemently off her hand, and turning both her capacious pockets inside out with a sudden jerk, "that's not a cheerful condition, is it? I haven't a sous, not one. I was obliged to give drink-money to those two fellows who came with me to fetch our mails from you

prison-house, and to get a pair of shoes for myself. I could not go barefoot in a house like this ; and now I haven't as much as would buy a plenishing of snuff for this *tabatière* ;" and she touched a silver box that lay beside her.

" Ah, this is certainly grievous ; but then we have everything we want, and have well-nigh no need for money," cried Maud, with the easiness of heedless youth.

" No need for money !" almost shrieked Dorothy. " You might as well say no need for eyes or ears. The penniless are helpless—blind and naked and miserable."

" Alas ! dear old friend," said Maud sadly as she came and sat low down on a stool at Dorothy's feet. " How can I help it ? How often has John Langley told me that I was a beggar ; that I owed everything to his bounty ; and now I am my aunt's debtor. Why is it that both make their gifts so bitter ? I am not foolishly proud ; I would gladly accept benefits from my own kin, as I would gladly bestow them ; but it is hard to take what is grudgingly given. Why is it that none in England seem to love me ? John

Langley laboriously hid his hatred. Harold"—she shuddered. "God's blessing be upon the man, be he who and what he may, that saved me from him," she added, with sudden vehemence; "and," in a quieter tone, "wherefore I know not, but my aunt does not love me, at least not yet. Ah, I did so hope to find a mother in her; nevertheless she is not unkind; but oh! would to God we were in the dear old home in France."

Hiding her face in Dorothy's lap, she yielded for a few moments to an irrepressible flood of tears.

"My lamb, my honey dear!" cried Dorothy in great distress, "you must not spoil your eyes. Bless us and save us! in a bare half-hour you'll have to dress and go down to my lady's levee. Here, dry them up; I am an omadhawn to talk to you like that." Dorothy was of Irish extraction, and sometimes garnished her speech with strange expressions. "All will come right by-and-by. No one seems to love you forsooth! Why, that quare little soul, Mistress Sparrow! (Faith, I would rather be alone on the house-top than lead the life she does!) but Mistress Sparrow says every

one is in love with you. You just open them lovely eyes o' yours, and pick out a real nobleman, and we will snap our fingers at uncles and aunts ! And don't you be downhearted. I've just dropped a hint to Master Chifferil, who seems a decent sort of creature"—she said "creature"—"he is my lady's secretary and mighty polite. I just ses to him, 'I suppose now the Countess has in a manner of speaking adopted my young lady, she will give her a trifle of pin-money. It's mighty uncomfortable not to have a farthing,' ses I; 'and them dirty devils of Whigs haven't left Lord Langdale's daughter a rap.'"

"Did you say all this?" cried Maud dismayed, raising her head to look in her nurse's face. "Why, Dorothy, my aunt will think me a beggar indeed if this man repeats these words. No, Dorothy, what I want I will ask my aunt myself; I want no go-betweens." She rose up and stood by the fire looking very grave.

"Ain't I the unfortunate woman to vex you?" cried Dorothy, first giving a tug to her hair and then resuming her stocking; "but anyhow, ye needn't fret, for though Master



Chifferil bowed and made a grand speech as what he wouldn't do for you, I'll engage he'd never dare open his lips to my lady about it. He is the most frightened little sinner I ever looked on. Sure I only spoke because I hate to see you without a penny in your pocket; and I am always miserable when my own are empty. But come, my jewel, it is time for you to dress yourself."

But Maud Langley did not heed her; she stood lost in thought, gazing at the fire. A train of most unpleasant reflections had been set in motion by Dorothy's words. The novelty and variety of her life since she had come under her aunt's roof had so dazzled and amused her, that save for some occasional shuddering fits when she thought of Harold, and the uncertainty which hung about her relations to him, she had for a while forgotten the painful mystery and dependence which enthralled her. Now her circumstances seemed to stand out before her mind's eye, in deepest blackness against the immediate brilliancy of her surroundings. She most dreaded the relative who alone had legal authority, which yet gave her no claim upon him. She was

penniless, and forbidden by her station and the prejudices of the age to earn her bread, even if she knew how. She was loaded with gifts by her aunt, who seemed scarce conscious of giving, and yet she distrusted that noble lady—much as she admired her. Not even to her beloved Dorothy had she betrayed the little scene she had witnessed on the night of her aunt's reception.

The dexterity of the Countess had almost dispersed the unpleasant doubts and suspicions which had been roused in Maud's innocent heart. Nevertheless, even alone as she thought over the occurrence, she felt the colour rise in her cheek when the recollection of her aunt's look, as she bent towards the Spaniard lounging so carelessly at her feet, came back like a revelation of what she had never before dreamed of. No! she felt, in spite of her attempts to reason away the impression, as if she were the depositary of a disgraceful secret, and not even to her trusty Dorothy would she breathe a syllable of what she had seen. In addition to the view of such conduct natural to a girl gravely, even severely, brought up, to Maud the beautiful Countess of Helms-

ford, at thirty-five, or possibly forty, seemed an elderly woman, in whom amatory follies were, to say the least, unbecoming; and it pained her infinitely to doubt the discretion of one she longed to respect. Nor did the handsome Monteiro fare better in her estimation. Dark and bronzed as he was, he was evidently a young man—years younger than the Countess. It was no doubt some impertinent folly of this audacious stranger which had betrayed her aunt into so unsuitable a position. And she would have expected better things of him, slight as had been the conversation that passed between them. He seemed so real, so courteous, so free from the complimentary absurdities that moved her mirth in others. Stranger though he was, she was grieved to be so disappointed in Don Juan di Monteiro, though indeed Mistress Sparrow's account might have prepared her for this or anything. Thus pondering sadly and nervously, Maud obeyed a second summons from Dorothy, and submitted to the solemn process of having her hair dressed.

Below stairs, in her study or writing-room, the Countess dictated letters and looked over

accounts, with the assistance of Chifferil. She was attired in an elaborate dishabille, of which maize-colour and crimson were the prevailing tints ; her profuse tresses loosely rolled up in preparation for the public hairdressing which was soon to ensue.

“I cannot make up my mind, Chifferil,” she said, looking from a paper on which she had been scribbling some figures, to the little secretary, who sat opposite her. “I cannot make up my mind whether to buy some more stock or to sell what I have. Craggs and Stanhope both advise me to buy—they say it is the most certain success. The Duke assures me it will fail ; nor does Mr. Walpole like it much. Then the price is monstrously high ; even if I sell out now, I shall have done well. The question will be—how to dispose of my capital. Eh, Chifferil ! if I sell my South Sea stock I will only buy or lend on land.”

“Your ladyship reasons well,” replied Chifferil ; “and I doubt not there are abundance of impecunious young heirs who would give you first-rate security.”

“I think I must sell—I think I must,” said

Lady Helmsford thoughtfully. "I have not done badly, Chifferil."

"No, indeed, madam ! few have your ladyship's head for business matters—money matters especially—and few dream of your success."

"The fewer the better, Chifferil, the fewer the better. I have ever known and felt that money is power." Instinctively the white jewelled hand that lay on the paper before her closed fast, as the Countess again seemed absorbed in thought. "Yes, money can buy nearly everything—nearly. I think I will sell, Chifferil ; I value Mr. Walpole's opinion much. Write—write to my broker to call here to-morrow early. I must instruct him myself."

A silence ensued, during which Chifferil's pen scratched quickly over the paper. He then presented an account-book, over which his mistress looked with some attention. The Countess of Helmsford had a strong organising and financial faculty, and liked to hold all wires that worked her life in her own hand.

"It is well," she said, returning it to him. "The amount is about the average."

Chifferil cleared his throat somewhat nervously. "Have you any commands, madam, touching the young lady, your ladyship's niece?"

"How! what do you mean?" cried the Countess, roused to sudden attention and suspicion. "You are splitting your pen, and writhing like an impaled worm—say out what you have to say."

"Nothing—nothing that need offend your ladyship. Only I presume Master Langley makes the young Baroness—young lady, I mean—no allowance, so, perhaps—a—"

"Well, sir! perhaps *I* will? On my word, Chifferil, you forget yourself. What has Mistress Maud Langley given you to plead her cause? She had better ask me herself."

"I solemnly and truly protest, honoured madam, I have never spoken to the young lady."

"I think I know that, still I do not understand your partisanship. Remember, if I find my servants adopting my niece's service I will soon quit me of you all, and send her back to her bastard uncle."

"Who will no doubt be too thankful to

grasp the heiress he dispossesses," said Chifferil meekly, yet bearing himself with unusual pluck under his mistress's rebuke.

"True—she may be a rich prize one day, and it is as well I should have the disposal of her. I will speak to Craggs and Sunderland respecting that pardon; even if it does not exist, another might be made out, and the attainder reversed. In the meantime, Chifferil, she shall have all she wants, save money. Of that—not a sou! With money in her purse I could never be sure of her. Talk of bolts and bars and dungeons, there's no such shackle as your empty pocket."

"Has the young lady any notion of her real state?"

"You mean that she may one day claim her father's lands? No; and she had better not—she would grow insolent. 'Twould be but human nature; and that would trouble me. I shall but look round me and mature my plans; then, whether John Langley likes or not, I shall appeal to the Ecclesiastical Court to undo this foolish marriage."

"'Tis a trying situation for the young lady."

“It is, it is! and nothing proves to me so strongly the existence of the pardon as this attempt on the part of some bold adventurer—probably penniless and low-born—so I shall keep her by me till I can decide what to do. If John Langley gets her he shall get nothing else. Now, Chifferil, I think I have seen to everything and given you due instructions. I must to my dressing-room. Signors Andrea and Martinez, the new singers, desire that I should hear them in a duet, and it is the hour I appointed. Be careful, Chifferil, I will have no second influence in my household.”

The secretary rose to bow as she left the room, and remained standing in thought, with a somewhat woebegone expression of countenance. “It is a terrible tangle,” he thought, indeed almost muttered; “the odds against that poor child’s happiness and rights are tremendous. She wants a powerful friend, and where is that to be found? The Spaniard is well-intentioned, but what can he, a stranger and a sort of adventurer, do?”

Chifferil shook his head, sorted his papers rapidly, closed and locked a bureau which stood open behind him, and, pausing to listen



to the sound of an arrival, went softly and quickly downstairs, where, in the hall, he encountered Monteiro, who had just come in. They greeted each other with ceremonious politeness, and, after a few studied sentences, shook hands and parted, Monteiro following a footman who requested him to walk upstairs.

He was ushered into a smaller apartment than he had yet seen, nevertheless it was extremely elegant. Panelled in rose-coloured satin with white lace curtains, and warmed by a glowing fire of mixed wood and coal. At the farther side from the windows was set forth an elaborate dressing-table covered with exquisite china and silver articles for the toilette, and having at the back a large mirror surmounted by a coronet and draped with lace festooned by rose-coloured ribbons. A number of chairs were ranged at mid-distance between the door and the fire, but the chamber was untenanted.

“My lady will be here directly,” said the lackey, giving Monteiro a chair and the fire an unnecessary poking.

The moment he was alone Don Juan drew

a small slip of paper from beneath his waistcoat, and read it over with quick eager eyes; then stooping, held it to the fire till the last line was consumed, watching the flaky feathery fragments float up the chimney with grave preoccupation, nor did he move for some moments till the rustle of a silk skirt attracted his attention. He turned, and stood face to face with Lady Helmsford.

Her ladyship's dishabille was most careful and becoming. Her long black hair was brushed back, and lay thick and heavy on her neck; rouge and patches and the whole paraphernalia of beauty's armoury were duly and admirably set forth, yet a heavy cloud darkened the brow of Venus. At sight of her Monteiro, dismissing his gravity, advanced with a gay smile and debonair manner. Taking her hand, he raised it with a familiar and caressing gesture to his lips.

"How goes it, ma belle?" he said pleasantly. "Here are thirty-six long hours that I have not had a chance of basking in the sunshine of your smile."

"And who have you to blame for that,

sir?" said Lady Helmsford, withdrawing her hand with an air of displeasure.

"I can scarcely tell," returned Monteiro, still smiling genially, and attempting to lead her to a seat. "Adverse circumstances and your own indecision, fair lady."

"How my indecision? Did I not give you a clue to my disguise for last night's masque?"

"Dios!" cried Don Juan. "The mists and fogs of this rainy capital must have dulled me, for I did not understand. I thought you avoided the explanation I sought; and so, not feeling over well treated, I went with Don Balthasar di Castro—one of the Spanish secretaries, a far-off cousin of mine—down the river to have a look at the shipping, which always interests me. We dined at the 'Folly House' at Blackwall, and had our coffee and chasse at that curious floating tavern on the river, and then, and then—oh! I scarce know what became of us after. At any rate, I strove to console myself for not daring to go to the masquerade. I thought your hesitation and—"

"Juan," said the Countess, seating herself

beside but not in front of the dressing-table, and looking at him sternly and sadly, a quiver in her proud lip, "you are in some way changed. Had you cared to meet me last night you would have understood and acted on my hint. You cannot deceive me—there is some new influence at work; you do not confide in me; you have never explained your unexpected presence here. Foolish boy!" she went on, stretching out her hand and drawing him to her, while he slowly knelt beside her with the air of not quite readily yielding to the caressing motion with which she laid one arm over his shoulder. "Foolish boy! whatever scheme you have on foot, am I, an ally, to be lightly dispensed with? Though I am not so very much your senior," she sighed, "circumstances have been at once cruel and kind to me. I have some power, much experience, and I have none to love. Juan, I would do much for you." There was wonderful tenderness in these words, and they seemed to rouse her hearer, though not exactly in the way she would have liked.

"You would do much for me," he repeated

quickly, his hold of her hand tightening almost painfully while he looked up full in her face, an eager sparkle in his own clear dark-brown eyes, which seemed for a moment to search into her soul; but the keen awakened look passed rapidly, and was replaced by his ordinary expression of careless gallantry. "You are always benevolent, dearest lady," he continued, "and I do not think the difference of our years so great that you can treat me as a favourite page—eh, Madame? Faith, I have left boyhood far behind; but how can you say you have none to love when so many love you? and now fortune, or Providence, if you will, has sent you a fair and tender flower to cherish, who will no doubt give you a sister's love"—he was going to say a *daughter's*.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Lady Helmsford, putting him from her and knitting her brows; "my niece, that pale colourless girl you have seen here once or twice?"

"Yes, ma belle. She is *your* niece, is she not?" he replied, with a mischievous smile. "All appertaining to you must be lovely."

The Countess was silent. It was hard to her proud indulged nature to feign.

"I do not love her," she said slowly. "I have seldom loved women, and her mother wronged me; besides, there is not much to love in her."

"Perhaps not," returned Monteiro prudently; and taking advantage of the lady's slightly repellant gesture, he rose and drew a chair near her. "But tell me, how was it I never saw her with you in Paris?"

"Because she was not there. It is scarce ten days since she took refuge here from her uncle, John Langley."

"And who may he be that dares to interfere with Lady Helmsford's niece?" Monteiro looked sharply at her for an instant as he spoke.

"Oh! a left-hand brother of the late lord; a back-door politician—a useful, ambitious, clever, resolute dog. He is known to most of the Ministers, and is secretary to my Lord Berkeley, who has been lately made First Lord of the Admiralty. They say he will be returned for S—— at the next vacancy. Indeed, I wonder the lands of Langdale have not been ere this formally made over to him."

“Wherefore does your niece fear him?”

“He wants her to wed his son.”

“Surely he is no match for her?”

“I am not sure. She is, poor child, a dependant on my bounty or John Langley’s, still I think I shall find her a better match than his son. My Lord Chedworth seems much struck. I think he might do. These old rakes,” continued her ladyship, laughing, “like callow fledglings—boys”—with a coquettish glance and toss of the head—“have better taste.”

Monteiro smiled a little constrainedly.

“They have, Madame,” he said. “And so you intend to wed her to Lord Chedworth?”

“Perhaps,” she replied. “But in truth there is a slight obstacle to be removed first. She has already gone through the marriage ceremony.”

“Indeed!” cried Don Juan.

“Yes. It is too long a story to tell you now, for we shall soon be interrupted, but it is a most romantic one. She does not know, or *says* she does not know, the bridegroom, yet is not quite willing to have the marriage broken, but it shall be—it shall be.” The

Countess waved her hand as if her will must be law.

“For a penniless dependant this young lady seems to have no lack of suitors,” observed Monteiro carelessly.

“Ah! there is a mystery in that,” cried the Countess, “which I may tell you one day; as it is, this marriage must be a great secret for many reasons. See, I trust you more than you do me, Juan. Why are you so changed?”

“It is but your fancy, dear and beautiful friend. As to me, I only seek a small favour from the King, of which there is no need of speaking now, as his Majesty is still in Hanover.”

“When he returns I may perhaps be of use to you then, dear Juan,” exclaimed the Countess. “If so, command me.”

“Oh! how can I sufficiently thank you for your friendship?” cried Monteiro, and rising, he approached, bent over her, and pressed his lips to her brow.

“Monteiro,” said Lady Helmsford in a warning tone, while she coloured painfully even through her rouge; at the same moment



a cautious tap was heard at the door. "Enter," said the Countess instantly. The audacious Spaniard with an undisturbed countenance turned to meet the intruder, who was Mistress Letitia Sparrow.

"Pardon me ; but the musicians and the hairdresser await your ladyship's permission to ascend."

"Admit them," returned Lady Helmsford mechanically. She was lost in displeasing thought—the handsome gallant Spaniard *was* changed. It was strange that he preferred the brow to the full red lips so near it. If she had a rival, Lady Helmsford felt it was some one not of the society to which both belonged. She had watched well ; for, thanks to her own notice and that of the Spanish Embassy, Monteiro was everywhere, and she had exulted in his evident disregard of beauties—dark or fair, married or single—all his public attention seemed riveted on herself. Now he was talking as genially, as courteously, to the insignificant companion as ever he did to her own high mightiness.

But the servants had ushered in first the French *coiffeur*, who, after a profusion of

bows, took a lace and muslin *peignoir* from Beville, her ladyship's woman, which he carefully disposed over her ladyship's shoulders, and proceeded at once to twist and torture her ladyship's long black tresses. The musicians came next—a new tenor and a barytone fresh from Venice. The men who served as the mediums of these important organs were—one, large, fleshy, animal-looking; the other, thin, dark, eager, wiry—both were decently but plainly clad; and they were accompanied by a tall, lank, poverty-stricken violinist. The Countess collected herself, and received the trio with grace and suavity.

“I think, my good Sparrow,” she said, “I need not trouble my niece—”

But the opening door admitted Maud Langley even as she spoke, and, after a short struggle with a frown, her ladyship succeeded in smiling on the new comer, who, gliding gracefully in, curtsied to her aunt, and took her seat against the fire.

“Do you not see Don Monteiro, child?” said the Countess.

“I have already acknowledged him, madam,” returned Maud, a faint colour stealing up

into her cheek, and then fading slowly away.

The musicians ranged themselves almost against the wall opposite the fireplace, and opened the music-book which they shared, the violinist looking on from behind and tuning his instrument.

Then Lord Viscount Chedworth, Captain Langley, and the Reverend Joseph Miles were announced in quick succession. Each new arrival bowed low to Lady Helmsford and turned some elaborate compliment, but seemed to regard hairdressing as too sacred a rite to be interrupted.

"I think we are quite ready, Signor. Rogers," to the servant, "admit no other visitor till this song is finished," said Lady Helmsford.

Whereupon "the singing men" opened their mouths and poured forth a rich melody, their voices blending deliciously.

Lord Chedworth, with many whispered flowery phrases, had seated himself on one side of Maud. Harold Langley stood at the other, in an elegant attitude. Opposite, and partly behind the Countess, sat Mistress Sparrow and Monteiro, who had drawn his chair side-

ways and was resting his arm on the back of it. His suit of dark blue, relieved by cut-steel buttons, his unpowdered hair and bronzed earnest face, being in strong contrast to the *petit-maitre* finery of the other men, though his costly lace and rich sword-hilt gave an air of distinction to his otherwise simple attire. On this side also sat the clergyman, who was a well-known preacher of liberal habits, with, it was supposed, an eye to a bishopric. Meantime the singers sang, and the rich notes thrilled through Maud's frame with a sort of painful delight. Never had she heard such music before! it woke up all the echoes in memory's cavern—the loved and lost came back to her with inexpressible tender sadness in their well-remembered looks; her heart swelled; and though she shrank from showing the emotion she could not restrain—the great tears would gather in her eyes and well over; her only shelter was her large fan, which she opened and contrived to hold between herself and Harold, as if to shade her face from the fire, looking steadily on the carpet, her hand now and then stealing up with her handkerchief to catch the falling drops. At last the song

ceased with some notes long drawn out and dying away in honeyed sweetness; then, raising her eyes, Maud encountered Monteiro's fixed upon her with a look so kindly, so expressive of sympathy, that, in spite of her doubts and disapprobation, a warm impulse of friendliness and gratitude throbbed for a beat or two through her heart. Perfectly frank and natural, she did not hesitate to give him an answering smile that brought him to her side, and made Lady Helmsford nearly drag the curl on which he was engaged out the *coiffeur's* hands, so suddenly did she turn her head at this movement.

"Such music is rare, Mademoiselle," said Monteiro in French, "and very delicious. I have heard Signor Andréa before, but never to such advantage. Have you been to the opera here or in Paris?"

"No, Monsieur," returned Maud, brightening up, her deep-blue eyes and wet lashes looking to her interrogator like violets steeped in dew; "I have been nowhere, and seen nothing. I always lived in an old château near St. Germain's—and I wish I were there now."

“But you would not have such excellent music there?”

“Ah no; but I should have all the music makes me long for.”

“What! could all your world be contained within the walls of an old château? ’Twould be a small universe for a noble lady.”

“So I thought once; now I would fain go back there.”

Maud felt somehow that in speaking French with the Spaniard she was transgressing and mortally offending her aunt, though it would have sorely puzzled her to account for the conviction; yet the temptation was too great to be resisted. She noticed, however, that, although fairly fluent, the Don’s French was neither so easy nor so correct as his English. He continued to talk with her for a few minutes, conveying she knew not what of sympathy and comprehension that was very delightful.

Then Lady Helmsford exclaimed:

“Come, come, Don Juan, you must not make my niece forget her manners in showing your own command of tongues.”

“I am justly rebuked,” he replied, turning

to the Countess ; “ but you must not say I have command of French—it has never become easy to me. Spanish is a far finer language. I wish you would let me teach you Spanish, Madame. Yours is just the mouth for its rich sonorous syllables.”

“ La, my Lady Helmsford would be weary at such a task,” simpered Mistress Letitia, whose observations seldom obtained much attention.

The servants now brought in tea, coffee, and chocolate ; and while Lord Chedworth told Maud of some exquisite china he had lately purchased, and spoke of making a party to display it and his house in Lincoln’s Inn Fields to Lady Helmsford and herself, Harold, feeling himself less prominent than he liked to be, prepared and presented a dish of tea to Maud ; at the same moment Monteiro offered her a cup of coffee.

“ Thank you, cousin,” she said, but she took the coffee.

“ I see,” remarked Harold, solacing himself with the rejected tea, “ that, like most ladies, you think a French dog better than an English lion. Coffee represents France with you.”

“Do not so traduce Mistress Langley,” exclaimed Monteiro; “surely she is patriotic.”

“Patriotism is not a modern virtue,” said Lord Chedworth.

“It is a thing Puritans and malcontents and adventurers prate of,” said Harold rudely, with a slight emphasis on the last epithet.

“And would-be men of fashion affect to despise,” returned Monteiro calmly. “Englishmen can afford to be patriotic; they have a country as well as a king; an individual existence as well as the faint shadow of some great general or statesman’s glory which their own blood and gold has built up. Every Englishman, so far as I can make out, seems to have his own lien on the rights and liberties of England.”

“Really, sir, you would be an acquisition in our House of Commons,” said Lord Chedworth, smiling not unkindly. “I see you are a Whig by nature.”

“Rather by adoption,” replied the Don. “I know no more enviable position than that of a member of your great governing house.”

“’Tis a goodly heritage doubtless,” returned Lord Chedworth.



“Ay, my lord, but it is the non-hereditary house which governs.”

“Really, Don Monteiro, you are a philosophic politician rather than what I have ever thought you—a man of pleasure,” remarked the Countess languidly.

“Ay, Madame, I love pleasure; but what man would be content with the sugared water of mere enjoyment when he can quaff the wine of action and work. That is why I would not only be half but whole English. In this country all men may have a career—privilege and legislative rights are not limited to a handful of nobles; and the future of England, as the limits that now exist stretch like widening circles on a lake wherein a stone has been dropped, will be magnificent.”

The Don stopped abruptly and stood a moment in thought, as if he had forgotten himself and his surroundings.

“But the mother’s blood does not constitute you English,” said Harold coldly.

“A father’s does,” retorted Monteiro.

“Pardon me,” returned Harold, with his best air; “your name?”

“You too would have assumed your

mother's name had it brought her wealth with it," said Monteiro curtly.

"But, my dear Don Juan," cried the Countess, who now stood up and, dismissing the hairdresser, handed her *peignoir* to her maid; "you are of strange opinions. Would you have the nobility share their privileges with the commonalty?"

"Yes, dear Countess; it is this circulation of the free air of discussion and widespread political rights that keep your constitution sound and safe, at least compared with other countries. Perhaps my ideas of brotherhood are somewhat peculiar; for, having passed my early youth where all white men were more or less noble and privileged, and black men formed the working order, I do not understand the disdain with which, in these countries, each class looks down on the one beneath it."

"I suppose the Don alludes to the Spanish main, where large numbers of blacks are employed on board the pirate vessels," said Harold sneeringly, as he took a pinch of scented snuff.

"Spanish America," returned Monteiro

gravely, "where they are even more largely employed than aboard the craft you mention."

"Pray, Messieurs," exclaimed the Countess, who did not like the tone of either gentlemen, and addressing the musicians—"pray delight our ears with another exquisite melody."

This time the tenor poured forth a melancholy ditty, but it did not affect Maud like the first. Nevertheless she noticed that Monteiro so placed himself as to intercept the eyes of those on his side of the room, so that had she again been moved to tears she would have escaped notice.

This greatly altered her opinion of the audacious Spaniard ; and as she looked with genuine admiration at her graceful well-preserved aunt, she told herself that it was quite possible she might be loved and sought ; so perhaps Don Monteiro and she might marry after all, and, thought the fair girl with a sigh, "I am sure he would be a kind kinsman to me."

The song over, Lady Helmsford directed the butler to offer the singers refreshment, and,

after many bows, they were conducted from the room.

During this movement Maud crossed to where Mistress Sparrow was sitting by herself, and in so doing she dropped her glove. Lady Helmsford's back was towards them as she acknowledged the musician's reverences, when Monteiro hastily snatched it from the ground and, with a rapid expressive gesture, pressed it to his lips before handing it to her. This action upset Maud's theories for a few moments; not that it conveyed so much in those days of exaggerated gallantry as it would now, but the look with which it was accompanied dwelt long in her memory. Covered with blushes, she took refuge with the amiable Letitia, who was not a little scared.

"La, my dear, Monsieur di Monteiro will get you into sore trouble if he does not heed," she whispered—an observation which completed Maud's annoyance and confusion.

The remainder of the levee was a painful indistinct picture to her. She heard Monteiro call the little negro to him, and speak for a while in Spanish with a very impressive

manner. She was vaguely conscious that Lord Chedworth invited the Countess and herself to an entertainment, including all present in the invitation—which Harold accepted and Monteiro declined. She did not attempt to resist when Mistress Sparrow, giving up her seat to Harold, left her to listen to his forced compliments and vapid talk, which only warmed into animation when he indulged in some vehement abuse of the Spaniard; who was, he said, a desperado, an adventurer, a cut-throat buccaneer; that my lady had better take care of her jewels, and the butler of his plate; that he, Harold, would speak to his father to ascertain through the gentlemen of the Spanish embassy who the fellow really was.

“For I have a right, fairest creature,” he concluded, “to know who is admitted to your society.”

“I think, Harold, you had better leave Lady Helmsford to choose my society; she would soon order you away if you interfered.”

“And then my father would soon remove you,” returned Harold in an overbearing

tone. "Great as my lady the Countess may be, she is not your legal guardian."

Maud at this rose; and, having now become somewhat familiar with the geography of the mansion, silently and softly passed through a door which opened behind the ornamented toilette-table into Lady Helmsford's real dressing-room, and thence upstairs to her own chamber, even while Lord Chedworth was making his adieux.

"Charming Countess, I kiss your hands. Don Monteiro, I am gratified by your admiration of my country; find a rich English wife, and settle here. We will gladly adopt you."

"'Tis just what I most desire," said Monteiro, with a gay jovial laugh. "English women are the loveliest and the best!"

"You see the fairest specimens *here*," said the courtly nobleman. "Mistress Langley, I—ah! she is gone."

"Gone," echoed Lady Helmsford. "Sparrow, go and see if she is in her chamber."

"Pray, Madame, can you tell me if a certain gentleman of some importance called Sir

Stephen Compton is in town?" asked Monteiro.

"Compton?" repeated the Countess. "I seem to know something of the name, but what I cannot tell."

"Sir Stephen Compton," said Lord Chedworth. "O yes! He is a somewhat wonderful instance of revived fortunes. Does not your ladyship remember he had run through his property a long time ago, and was appointed governor of one of the American provinces almost for charity. Why, he even took his daughters out there. About two years since he came back in better case, daughters and all. He is one of the very few Englishmen who can speak German, having been at Zell and Hanover in his youth; and he was at once taken into favour by our German sovereign—very great favour. He is away with his Majesty in Hanover now, and will return with him—when is it? In March is he not expected?"

"March!" echoed Monteiro; "and it is now the beginning of February—over a month then."

But Lord Chedworth was repeating his

adieux, and did not heed. No sooner had he bowed himself away than Lady Helmsford, turning sharply to Harold, said pointedly :

“I wish you a very good-day, sir.”

It required some nerve to stand to your guns when charged by the Countess, but Harold Langley’s was not deficient.

“I hoped for a word or two with you alone, madam,” he said.

“Not now,” she returned abruptly ; “on some other occasion.”

“I hope your ladyship will find the occasion soon,” he returned stoutly ; “as the matter concerns my fair cousin, my betrothed.”

“Indeed!” said the Countess haughtily. “Then if you are hurried, write your communications. I wish you good-morning.”

Harold felt compelled to retreat.

Lady Helmsford paused till the door had safely closed upon him, and then, turning from Monteiro, swept to and fro for a few moments in angry silence.

“That girl,” she said at length ; “that girl—she was sent hither to torment me. Why



should I plague myself with her and her troubles. I will send her back to John Langley, and clear my house of her followers. There is some influence about her malignant to me."

"What!" exclaimed Monteiro, who was watching her carefully; "the brilliant Lady Helmsford, the esprit fort par excellence, superstitious? Impossible!"

"Well, if not superstitious, objecting to be worried with the airs and graces of that insufferable coxcomb."

"That is another matter," said Monteiro.

"I tell you, Juan, I will finish this, and wed her to Lord Chedworth."

"It would doubtless be your best course. And now farewell, dear lady, till to-night or to-morrow."

"What, going already?"

"I must, ma belle. I have an appointment."

"An appointment?"

"Oh, business—business of the severest description."

"But we meet to-night at the Duchess's ridotto?"

“Without fail. And your niece, dare you leave her behind?”

“Why do you ask?” with a startled look.

“Oh, lest the bold Captain Langley spirit her away.”

“Pooh, pooh! *He* dare not.”



## CHAPTER IX.



HE morning after Lady Helmsford's levee, John Langley was still sitting at his breakfast-table, although it was later than his usual time for leaving the house.

Theresidenceofthe respectable Master Langley, the capable secretary of my Lord Berkeley, was situated in Great Queen Street—an excellent position. The house was substantial and convenient, and had passed into Master Langley's hands at small cost, in part payment of a debt incurred by the spendthrift son of a nobleman. Master Langley had early begun to lay the foundation of his fortunes by lending, first small, and then larger, sums to

the impecunious boon companions of his brother, and those to whom they introduced him.

He was, as usual, dressed with precise neatness, though with careful solid simplicity. The dining-room in which he sat was heavily furnished, with the massive chairs and cabinets of fifty years before, yet all things bore a cared-for aspect, as if a rigid discipline regulated the establishment.

Master Langley had been reading the *Daily Courant*, and laid it down to reperuse a letter which lay open before him ; this was in its turn put aside, and Langley sat for a few minutes looking in a somewhat expectant manner at the door.

It opened at last to admit Harold, who entered, dressed in the uniform of his regiment—the Coldstream Guards.

“ Well, sir, you are late ? ”

“ Could not help it, sir ; I was on duty this morning. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales did us the honour of an early inspection.”

“ Indeed ! Anyhow, Harold, I am glad to have an opportunity of discussing matters

with you. Albeit I must soon be at the Admiralty. It is as hard to catch you as if you were First Minister."

"I was coming to see you to-day, sir, even if you had not sent for me."

"Indeed, Harold! Then you want something?"

"Yes, father; I want you to fulfil your promise. Gad! I am ashamed, after the certain promises *I* made to all my tradespeople, to have them still dunning and hunting me. Come, sir! you know you said you would set me right if I would wed your niece. I am ready to keep my word—why will you not keep yours?"

"When you are Maud Langley's husband you shall not have a debt in the world; till you are, boy, I do not feel sure of you. You do not like the girl, and you can be so easily drawn away by any whim or fancy that crosses you, I dare not relax the slightest precaution in the difficult game we are playing."

"On my honour, sir," said Harold earnestly, "I am quite as anxious for the marriage as you can possibly be; but, zounds! if you will not satisfy my creditors, I fear I shall very

soon be where I can neither make nor mar your plots."

"You mean you will be in the King's Bench? Tush! you shall not, my son; I will see to that. Meantime tell me how you prosper. Is my Lady Helmsford gracious? Is Mistress Maud more propitious? How do you stand?"

"Well, in truth I hardly know! The Countess is—I cannot say I have aught to complain of, yet she makes me feel wondrous small; and I cannot help conjecturing that she would throw us over at any moment. Madam Maud herself is just the devil's own mixture of sweet coldness and polished pride." Harold frowned uncomfortably. "I like not the company round her. There is an old spindleshanks who is ready to fall at her feet—do you know him, sir?—Lord Chedworth?"

"I do, I do," returned Master Langley, with much interest. "A wealthy and independent nobleman—a dangerous rival, Harold."

Harold laughed contemptuously.

"There is another man whom I should fear much more, only he is evidently the Countess's lover—and trust her to take care of him—a stranger, an adventurer. I wish you could

make out something respecting him—a Don Juan di Monteiro. He is evidently well-known to the Spanish Ambassador ; but there is something about the fellow I abhor and distrust.”

“If he is an adventurer,” said Master Langley slowly, “he will seek to wed with the rich widow rather than the penniless spinster. I will, however, make inquiries. But Lord Chedworth, he is more dangerous. He is quite rich enough to indulge fancy ; and by the ordinary law of such matters, the pardon is much more likely to be discovered for the benefit of the Viscountess Chedworth than for the poor orphan. I wish, Harold, we had not brought that troublesome piece of female flesh to town. Her escape to Lady Helmsford was a most crooked bit of ill-fortune ; we could have managed her better at Langdale.”

“There was that parson in the way there.”

“The parson was easier to deal with than the Countess.”

“Ay, sir. But why do we hesitate and delay in this fashion ? Take heart of grace, sir, and lose no time in breaking this accursed

marriage. It is impossible any harm can come of your taking action. 'Tis your duty, as Maud's guardian; then resume the custody of her person. Even if the pardon is produced, you are none the less her guardian—she will not be of age for two years."

"There is reason in what you say, Harold; yet I would that she were in my hands again."

"Upon my soul!" cried the young guardman, "the play is scarce worth the candle. What a troublesome coil the whole thing is! I do not think I would care follow it up were it not to spite and outwit the scoundrel who trapped me."

"You foolish boy! Maud Langley is the best and the greatest match for you. I have sworn that you shall be Lord of Langdale. Pardon or no pardon, wed her! Once she is your wife, I could with a good grace plead for the reversal of the attainder. She *must* be in our hands again, and soon." Master Langley paused, looked keenly at his son, and continued in a lower tone, but with cynical calmness: "I have the outline of a romantic



plot in my head. Why should you not, in the ardour of your passion for your fair cousin, take advantage of the fear which possesses us all, lest the impostor who personated you carry her away, and elope with her yourself—of *course*, without my knowledge. The unknown bridegroom would get the credit of the raid ; and when, after a week or so passed *alone* with you, you bring her back to ask my paternal blessing, she would be ready enough to allow the legalising of one marriage and the rupture of the other.”

“ ‘Fore heaven ! ’tis a rare scheme, and a villainous one,” cried Harold. “ Why, sir, you will compose a poem next ! Yet I do not see why my young lady should object to me. I will make her as good a husband as she need desire. But what prompted so excellent a device ? ”

“ I can scarce take time to tell you now, Harold. Only yesterday I met the poor wretch who first brought me news that the pardon existed. He looked indeed miserable, and without waiting to be asked I gave him an alms ; whereupon, with many thanks, he begged to speak with me—he said he had

been seeking me. It seems he has been reduced to carry a chair or hold a link, and in some way has heard of a scheme to carry off the Langdale orphan. It seems one of the commoner sort of Jacobites, who infest some tavern behind Holborn, is the man who personated the bridegroom on that unlucky day. I imagine he performed his part at the bidding of some one else, and now he is inclined to turn the scheme to his own advantage; but it also seems that he is unable to act for want of funds, and that the fact of young Mistress Langley being under Lady Helmsford's roof is a difficulty. Were she under mine, Harold, how simple the affair would be. However, if the would-be gallant is poor, he can be bought. I will contrive an interview and sound him."

"'Tis a strange invention," replied Harold, with a sort of reluctant admiration. "I dare say we will end by being a fair specimen of a fashionable couple, Mistress Maud and myself. But I wish it was beautiful Kitty Barlow I was to run away with."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed his father, with supreme contempt. "In a question of mar-

riage I imagine one woman is as good as another. Yet I remember having to struggle with myself. When I was young I was sorely tempted to marry a pretty humble lass, but I resisted, my son, I resisted. Now be wary and adroit, play the lover cunningly. I will see to the matter I have indicated. I would have you wed before his Majesty returns. Lord Sunderland is my friend, so is Craggs—I can count on my Lord Berkeley, and 'twill go hard if sympathy with a dispossessed orphan and a pair of true lovers will not induce them to settle the heritage of Langdale in the new and the right line."

"Zounds, sir! you ought to be Prime Minister yourself," cried Harold; "and Snippet, my confiding tailor, and Truefit, and the rest of the pack that are in full cry, you'll give them something to worry on—just to keep them quiet? On my word I am at your service?"

"I believe it, Harold—so make your mind easy on that point. Sup with me to-night, I shall have more to say; my time is now at an end."

Harold rose and walked to the fireplace.

He leant against the mantelpiece for a moment in silence, and then exclaimed :

“ By —— I’ll be glad when the play is played out ! It will take no small amount of courage to face Maud Langley when her blood is up——”

“ Afraid ? ” said his father contemptuously——  
“ afraid of a girl who will probably turn from indifference to doating when she finds what you have dared and done for her ? ”

“ Well, ’tis as like she will as not.”

“ And the sooner we take action the better,” continued John Langley, with unusual animation. “ For if any entanglement occurs between my ward and Lord Chedworth ’twill increase our difficulties tenfold.”

“ He is a fantastic scarecrow to fear as a rival.”

“ A scarecrow with ten or fifteen thousand a year must always be formidable. But good-morrow to you, Harold, I am already late ; ” and, formal even in his intercourse with his son, Master Langley bowed and left the room.

Harold walked restlessly to and fro for a while, with an uneasy expression of countenance. At last he rang, and asked the

servant who appeared if he could bring him some brandy.

"Indeed I cannot, sir. I doubt if there's any spirits in the house, and your worshipful father always carries the keys himself. A cup of ale now—"

"Bring it!" interrupted Harold, again resting against the mantelpiece. The man went and came back quickly, bearing a jug and glass. He poured out the desired beverage, frothing it up to the best of his ability. Harold took a hasty draught and then set down the glass with a grimace of unspeakable disgust.

"'Sblood!" he exclaimed, "if my father can brew such inventions over rot-gut tippie like this, gad! he'd outplot the College of Jesuits with a bottle of Burgundy."

So saying he seized his feathered hat and hastily left the house.

The gay guardsman swaggered down Long Acre, and turning into "Leicester Fields," he sauntered past the residence of the Prince of Wales—greeting some acquaintance as he went—intending to call upon a brother officer and ascertain if he was inclined to accompany

him to the famous cock-pit at Westminster, to see if any sport was going on. At the corner of the Haymarket a tall gaunt man in high boots, a suit of crimson cloth much rubbed and stained, but surmounted by a handsomely-laced beaver, coming from an opposite direction, and apparently in deep thought, ran against him.

“Gad’s blood, sir! don’t you see where you are going?” cried the insolent fine gentleman, who felt both anxious and consequently irritable for more reasons than one.

“Begad I do—when there’s anything worth seeing,” retorted the other, with a peculiar accent and an air of the profoundest contempt.

This completely upset the small balance of self-control which the previous night’s carouse and the morning’s conversation had left Harold; and telling the gaunt man to “Clear the way, for a presumptuous cut-throat!” he attempted to pass on.

“Oh! I’m a cut-throat, am I? Well, you ought to know who is and who isn’t, seeing you wear the butcher’s livery.”

“’S’death, sir!” cried Harold, “I’ll make you eat your words.”

“Here’s a knife to cut them then,” replied the other, drawing his long rapier, and still preserving his cool contemptuous tone; “out with your toasting-fork, young gentleman, and I’ll give you a lesson in *carte and tierce*.”

The passers-by paused, delighted. “A fight between two bloods,” they said to each other. “I’ll back the young ’un.” “No, no, Long-shanks looks as if he knew how to handle his blade.”

They gathered round and formed a ring at the first sound of the steel, for Harold Langley had flashed out his sword before his adversary had ceased speaking.

“Well parried,” said the gaunt man after the first few passes. “A clever *seconde*. Faith! you’ve had a French master of fence, don’t be in a hurry,” as Harold pressed on him furiously.

The lookers-on applauded. The few women of the better class who happened to be amongst them uttered small shrieks and exclamations, yet nevertheless held back their hoods to gaze with immense interest at the conflict. As the crowd increased, a small neatly-dressed man, wrapped in a comfortable cloak

and having an air of the severest respectability, was pushed to the front, evidently against his will, as he was endeavouring to cross to the opposite side of the Haymarket by skirting the scene of the fray.

“’Tis a disgrace to a civilised people,” he murmured, “to have these brawls in their streets. Certes, gentlemen, ye should separate the combatants rather than encourage them by on-looking.”

His words, however, fell unheeded by those nearest him, and he himself, with a sudden exclamation, paused, seemingly struck with the same interest as the rest.

“’Tis he himself—Captain Langley,” he said aloud ; “now would my lady be well pleased were he just slightly disabled for a time.” This he thought ; but as he thought the tall rusty man, with a smart cut over the point and dexterous turn of his powerful wrist, sent Harold’s rapier flying out of his grasp.

The successful swordsman immediately picked it up, and presenting it with an air of chivalrous politeness to his antagonist, said :

“ Well fought, sir ! you have been fairly trained, though scarce in so high a school as



myself. Now go home, and the next time a decent man chances to run against you, keep a civil tongue in your head." Lifting his hat, he replaced it with a fierce cock over his left eye, and strode solemnly away.

The little crowd speedily dispersed, the women, as they passed on, declaring the young officer to be a "pretty fellow," and hoping the rusty man had not hurt him with the cruel sharp twist he had given his hand. Harold himself, rather restored to equanimity by this outlet to his ill-humour, sheathed his sword and went his way.

Meantime the small gentleman (Chifferil, in short) picked his way down the Haymarket and through the labyrinth of narrow streets which then covered the site of Trafalgar Square, and turned down Salisbury Street, quickening his steps along the Strand, where he curiously examined the numbers of the houses, and finally knocked at a door. It was opened by a stout buxom female, in a puce-coloured dress of some warm woollen stuff, and cherry ribbons in her cap.

"Is a gentleman—a—Don Juan di Monteiro lodging here?"

“Yes, sir,” returned the woman. “Pray walk in. The Don is even now engaged; but I am sure he will receive you; follow me if you please.” She led the way up an extremely dark but wide staircase to a landing above, off which two or three doors opened. Knocking at one, and pausing in vain for an answer, she opened and ushered in Chifferil.

The room was panelled in oak, and contained nothing save massive chairs, a table, and a sideboard of the same description, on which stood some foreign-looking bottles and glasses. The fire had burned low, and the light was scant, although it was but just mid-day. Another door, nearly opposite the first, was partially open, and, again tapping at this, the landlady entered and spoke to some one within. In a few minutes she returned.

“You may enter, sir,” she said; and Chifferil entered.

He found himself in a much warmer, lighter, larger room than the ante-chamber. The furniture, indeed, was plain and heavy; but a large fire, one or two skins of bear or tiger on the oaken floor, a cloak and rapier on a chair, a mask and gloves, with strange out-

landish pipes lying about, and one or two richly-decorated coffers or small cabinets, gave a comfortable inhabited look to the apartment.

Don Monteiro was lounging in a deep arm-chair, wrapped in a long loose dressing-robe of deep blue, bordered with a curious pattern of various well-blended colours, but strange workmanship, the like of which little Chifferil had never seen before ; and he had the sort of observant faculty that would have been invaluable to a man-milliner. Opposite to the Don, his long legs stretched out towards the fire, his long arms resting on the table, his hat on the ground beside him, sat the very man who had just had the duello with Captain Langley. The sight of him made the precise secretary feel rather uncomfortable. His aspect was not indeed very reassuring—a face long and thin enough for the Knight of La Mancha, a large hooked nose, a wide mouth, with a deep scar extending from one corner almost to the right ear, stern, sunken, glittering dark eyes, looking like caverns under their heavy shaggy brows—and yet, withal, a certain expression of grim humour over all.

Monteiro rose courteously to greet Chifferil with a pleasant smile.

"What an admirably punctual fellow you are," he said ; "and that too when you are by no means your own master."

"Perhaps 'tis because I am compelled to be so very punctual on the one side that I keep such good time on the other," said the secretary, laying aside his hat and cloak, taking the seat offered him near the fire and rubbing his thin hands.

"This," said Monteiro, waving his hand with a kind of respectful gravity towards his other visitor, "is my good friend Don Hyacinth D'Arcy. I did not think of your meeting to-day ; but I am glad you have, for he is, like ourselves, willing to devote himself to the service of Lord Langdale's daughter."

"Indeed !" said Chifferil, with a slight cough ; "I'm sure I am much gratified to make the gentleman's acquaintance."

"Sir, your most obedient," returned D'Arcy, gathering up his long limbs as he rose and made a bow.

"You would have scarce met this morning," resumed Monteiro, laughing, "had not my

peppery friend paused on his road here to indulge his inveterate love of fighting, and exceeded that strict punctuality you so admirably observe."

"It took me but a bare ten minutes to give a lesson to a very smart young gentleman in the noble art of fencing."

"D'Arcy, my friend, I will take it as a personal favour if you will keep out of broils for a month."

"A month, noble Captain! that is a long spell."

"Yes, a whole month!"

"I should imagine the gallant gentleman was indeed an adept," said Chifferil, with a complimentary smirk. "He made the young Captain's sword fly from his grasp as if by the touch of a necromancer."

"Captain! what Captain?" cried Monteiro, looking up with surprise. "Were you present, Chifferil?"

"Yes, sir; by mere accident, walking here through the Haymarket. This gentleman's antagonist was no less than Captain Langley."

"Begad! he has a mighty nate notion of fence," said D'Arcy gravely.

"This is curious," said Monteiro ; "that accident should have pitted you against the son of the usurper—the man on whom he would bestow the young Baroness."

"Ye don't tell me so," cried D'Arcy, with much animation. "Be the powers, if I had known that I'd have let daylight into him!"

"Better not," said Monteiro, with an air of calm reflection ; "you might possibly have let in a little too much ! and I do not want unnecessary bloodshed. Now, D'Arcy, you can tell us what you had begun when Master Chifferil came in. I will answer for his fidelity."

D'Arcy turned in his seat and contemplated Chifferil in a somewhat appalling manner for a minute or two in silence, and then said in a tone of grave approbation, "I thought you were of the right sort the night I seen ye rattlin' the tay-cup at Lamb's. Ye didn't see me, but I see more than most—"

"What ! do you recognise me," cried Chifferil, evidently discomfited.

"You were a bird of too different a feather from the rest not to be noticed," returned D'Arcy carelessly.

“Come, come,” said Monteiro, with some impatience; “you can trust each other, so do not lose time; your news, D’Arcy, your news?”

“Well, Excellency, there’s not much; the grand plot hangs fire for want of ammunition. That blethering brute Morley pretends he is in communication with the young lady, and waits her signal to carry her off.”

“The lying hound!” cried Monteiro. “His audacity makes one laugh.”

“Elliott and Stephens and the others they believe him, and I seem to do the same, but I see he is dashed by something. I fancy he don’t like to meddle with her while she is with Lady Helmsford; and, besides, he has no funds.”

“Will you be so considerate as to enlighten my ignorance?” said Chifferil imploringly, as he fidgeted on the edge of his chair with nervous curiosity.

“The key of the riddle is, shortly, this,” returned Monteiro. “It seems a gang of these desperadoes have got scent that some document exists by which the young Baroness may be restored to her rights, and Morley declares

he is the man that substituted himself for the bridegroom at yonder mysterious marriage, so he has engaged a choice party, our friend here and others," with a wave of the hand to D'Arcy, "to assist him in carrying off the bride. The attempt was to have been made as the party travelled up from Langdale, but it seems the enterprising Morley had not very correct information, and the lady was safely lodged in Lady Helmsford's house before he was well aware they had left the country. Now fresh difficulties arise. Mistress Langley is so well guarded, and the dog's pockets are so low, he can do nothing."

"I myself think he is inclined to back out of the undertaking, but doesn't like to say so, and tells us a cock and a bull story about waiting for notice of the young lady's own wishes."

"How mean you?" cried poor little Chifferil, starting from his seat in his terror and distress, as the comprehension of this plot grew upon him. "One of those foul knaves I saw at Lamb's carry off fair gentle Mistress Langley? Oh, sir! Spaniard or whatever you



may be, you, sure, are too much of a Christian to permit this ?”

Monteiro looked at him curiously. “ I see you are stanch, Chifferil,” he said. “ Make your mind easy, not a hair of her head shall be touched.”

“ Be the powers, no !” growled D’Arcy. “ There will be wigs on the green first.”

“ More,” added Monteiro. “ It shall go hard but I will keep even from passing fear.”

“ Would it not be best to warn my lady ?” asked Chifferil anxiously. “ She is somewhat kittle to deal with, but she would let no one touch her niece, unless indeed—” Chifferil paused abruptly.

Monteiro noticed the pause, and turned an earnest questioning look upon him. “ Rest tranquil,” he said. “ My trusty friend here will keep me informed of all that goes on ; and you, Chifferil, will let me know all that passes at Lady Helmsford’s. I think amongst us we shall be able to guard the heiress of Langdale from harm till she can claim her own.”

“ The marvel to me,” said Chifferil, who had resumed his seat, “ is, how any great hulking

fellow, as most of those at Lamb's seemed to be, could manage to get into that slim young Captain's clothes. Mistress Dorothy tells me he forced the Captain to change clothes with him."

"'Tis very hard to get at the truth of the matter," replied Monteiro. "All our task is to save the young lady from the disastrous consequences which might arise from this extraordinary marriage. You see, if any villain carried her off under the pretext of being her husband, he could not be punished, for she is certainly wed; and it seems no one knows who the bridegroom is, not even the bride. Faith, it is most strange."

"Will the excellent Don Hyacinth (I think your honour called him) excuse me, but I have a matter for your private ear," said Chifferil, with extreme and cautious politeness. "And I am somewhat pressed for time. My lady ordered me to attend Mistress Langley, who with much entreaty hath obtained permission from the Countess to take a little exercise on the Mall this afternoon with her woman, and the hour is now nigh."

"To walk abroad! this is imprudent," cried

Monteiro, with some uneasiness. "D'Arcy, have you breakfasted?"

"So long ago, Excellency, that I begin to think of my dinner."

Monteiro started from his seat and called aloud, "Victor." An unmistakably French valet, his hair in papers, came swiftly at the summons. "Take this gentleman, Victor, and see that he has refreshment—dinner, wine, all that he needs," said Monteiro in French. It was evident from his brightening countenance that D'Arcy understood the drift of the speech.

"Go, amigo! stow away as much provision as you conveniently can in the shortest time, and then you must away to the Mall. Watch for Master Chifferil; notice the lady with him, and be ready to aid him and her in case of need. Stay. I shall probably pass that way myself, why should I not—" Monteiro paused abruptly, and seemed lost in thought for a moment; then exclaiming, "Go!" waved the valet and D'Arcy from the room.

"Now," he exclaimed quickly, "your private business, good Chifferil?"

“To deliver this,” he replied, drawing a letter from his pocket, “and to receive your answer ; had it not been for this missive, I should have been less punctual.”

Don Juan seized the perfumed delicate paper, and, tearing it open, glanced at the contents ; then, we regret to say, threw it across the table with an impatient oath.

“’Tis the Devil’s own coil,” he said in an irritable manner, and sat thinking for a few minutes. “How the consequences of a man’s folly or weakness are sure to pursue him !” he exclaimed at length ; and, rising, he again took up the letter, reperused it, and drawing forth writing materials from a cabinet, he rapidly traced some lines, folded and directed the paper : committing the letter he had just written to Chifferil, and the one he had received to the flames. “Now tell me,” he said, drawing his chair close to the secretary’s, and speaking in a low tone, “what doubt crossed your mind just now when, speaking of Lady Helmsford’s care for her niece, you added ‘unless,’ and hesitated ? Surely, as a woman, she must wish to shelter so fair and helpless a creature from harm ?”

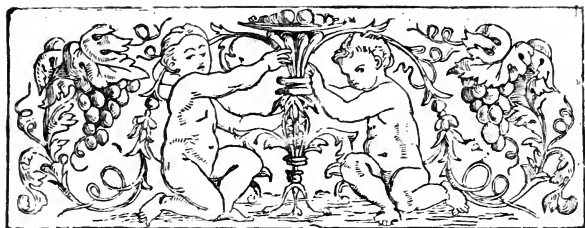
“Indeed, sir, I trust you much, or I would not say this ; in some things my lady is—well, a trifle cruel. I know she hated Lord Langdale ; they say for preferring her younger sister to herself. I do not think she loves Mistress Maud ; though ’tis enough to melt the stoniest heart to see how that sweet young lady strives to win her love ! and my lady has her times of relenting ; but, respected sir, if I might offer my humble counsel, I would say, you should walk in the Mall this afternoon, do not join the young lady and Mistress Dorothy ; it might be noticed, it might—” The good little secretary’s words died nervously away as he watched the heavy frown gather on Monteiro’s brow.

“But I will !” cried that gentleman, laying his hand somewhat heavily on Chifferil’s shoulder. “If a dozen fiends, male and female, stood in the way, I will ! Why should I not ?”

“Oh, as your worship pleases ; only I thought—only I feared—”

“Cheer up, man,” said Monteiro, rising, his brow clearing and a pleasant smile lighting up his countenance. “There is more to

hope than to fear ; every day that passes brings us nearer the deliverance I seek for my Lady Maud ; but also, I grant, makes the dangers for her more dangerous : of these the worst is John Langley and his son. Now, good Chifferil, begone ! I must dress and go forth."



## CHAPTER X.

**T**HE long imprisonment, first in Langley's residence, and then in her aunt's, had affected Maud much.

She had been more used to free air and exercise than the generality of young ladies at the period of this tale, and she now pined for a little liberty. The morning after the levee her aunt, being in unusual good temper, had invited her niece to breakfast, and abused Harold Langley in no measured terms ; nevertheless informing her dismayed listener that, if the worst came to the worst, it would be better to marry him than sink into a *dame de compagnie*, "like Sparrow," concluded the Countess ; "for, of course, I

may marry myself—it is not at all improbable; and then you could not expect me to provide for you.”

“Indeed, I do not, dear aunt,” returned Maud, smiling; and, prompted by her sincere admiration, she added, “I am sure you are fair enough to be sought by many; and I hope you will wed happily some one who will be brighter and more debonair than an Englishman *pur sang*.” Maud spoke archly, for her aunt’s words, coupled with what she had herself noticed, convinced her that Lady Helmsford had agreed to marry the Spaniard.

The Countess looked up quickly, but Maud’s expression told her she spoke in perfectly good faith; so with unwonted graciousness she replied, “You are a silly chit to form any conjectures.” Yet the conjecture pleased Lady Helmsford.

“What you should do with Dorothy and myself, sweet Countess,” resumed Maud, “is to send us both back to France—back to my good dear Madame Wandesforde. It never seemed to cost anything to live there, and I can embroider and mend lace; and help myself perhaps thus.”



“My niece, Lord Langdale’s daughter, work for her bread! What a preposterous idea!” cried my lady.

“Alas! madam, Lord Langdale’s daughter must eat; but think of my return to France as possible, dear aunt, and perhaps it will become so.”

“Foolish child, there is a better destiny in store for you. Maud, do you know I believe you are at this moment Baroness Langdale? Does that not move you?”

“Not much, madam.”

“I am certain your father’s attainder was reversed: hence the desire of John Langley to wed you to his son. Trust me he knows your rights!”

“Well, if he will set me free, and give me wherewithal to live, however humbly, where I was once so happy, he may take my rights.”

“I did not think you could be so tame and spiritless, Maud,” cried the Countess contemptuously.

“I am! I have suffered so much — so much! but there is one favour you might grant me, my aunt.”

“What is it?”

“Give me leave to walk out. With Dorothy, and in my hood, I should be safe and unnoticed enough. It is so bright and mild to-day.”

The Countess demurred; but being for sundry reasons in a good mood, and Maud warmly pressing her prayer, she at length acceded. With great delight the pretty prisoner flew to her humble friend.

“Dorothy, dear Dorothy, set forth my hood and warm muffler. My aunt says we may walk forth to-day about one. When Master Chifferil returns from some errand, and can go with us into the Mall, dear Dorothy.”

“Eh, my bird! I am glad, for it is weary work being mewed up here. I will go and fetch your thicker shoes; they are in one of the mails in my chamber.”

Dorothy accordingly trotted off, and Maud went into her bedroom, which was within her small study or sitting-room, to don a warmer skirt than what she wore. Then remembering she had left a favourite fan in the outer apartment, she thought she would lay it safe in a drawer before she went out. It was not where she thought she had seen it, but lying

on the spinnet on which she had been playing before going to breakfast with her aunt, and which helped to while away many moments that would otherwise have hung heavily. The fan was partly open, and on seeking to close it something hindered her. She looked, and saw a small folded paper slipped between the sticks of the fan. She withdrew and unfolded it. It was covered with small square characters, more like printing than writing. After a moment's bewilderment Maud read as follows :

“MADAM,—He who ventured to usurp your bridegroom's place implores you to trust him yet awhile. Hold still to the marriage, and on the faith of a gentleman it shall in no way hamper you when you no longer need a shield. For your own sake, for mine, keep this communication a secret, and believe ever in the devotion of your husband.”

Twice did Maud read this through before her great astonishment permitted her thoroughly to understand its sense. The effect the mysterious billet produced was bewilder-

ing. How did it come there? Her fan had lain on the table she was certain when she had been in the room a few minutes before; the door had been open, and she had heard no sound of any one entering. It was most mysterious, and gave her a strange creepy sensation of being wrapped round by some shadowy guardianship which alarmed more than it assured her.

She read the lines over again, and trembled with a sensation which was not all horror at the idea of her unknown husband. Would he indeed prove a faithful friend, or would he be a self-interested persecutor? Whoever and whatever he was, he could not be so abhorrent as Harold, from whom he had saved her, and she would certainly obey his injunction so far as for the present to cling to her marriage as to a shield.

But how could this mysterious man have found means to transmit a billet to her in her aunt's strictly-ordered household? Certainly it must be kept a secret, or her aunt would rave the house down, but to Dorothy she must speak; the secret all to herself was more than she could bear. Ah! what straits.

was she in ! none could deliver her save one. The poor young creature sank on her knees and prayed fervently for guidance and protection. She was still in an attitude of devotion when Dorothy returned with the shoes she sought in her hand. She stopped in respectful silence, but with a look of surprise. Maud instantly arose.

“Come with me, Dorothy,” she said in a suppressed tone, and drew her into the bed-chamber, closing the door with much precaution. “Sit there, dear Dorothy,” she whispered, drawing a chair into the window, and then kneeling down beside her humble friend ; “promise me, Dorothy, that you will never breathe a word of what I am going to tell you.”

“Me ? Oh, never, my darling !”

“To no one ?”

“Never shall it cross my lips.”

“Then Dorothy do not scream or call out. Read that ; I found it between the sticks of my fan.”

With considerable help from her mistress Dorothy obeyed, Maud having passed one arm through hers, and holding the letter in

the other hand. The moment they reached the word "husband" Dorothy's mouth opened, and Maud instantly dropped the paper and clapped her hand upon it. "Your promise, good nurse!"

"The villain!" exclaimed Dorothy in a vehement whisper. "How? what next? we will not venture to sleep in our beds! Why, dear lamb, he must be Satan himself, to get a billet introduced into *this* house! Now who was the messenger? Truscott, the second footman? he is too timorsome a chap; or Betty? no—her fingers are too clumsy to slip it in between your fan sticks. Could it be Master Chifferil?"

"My aunt's trusted secretary? Impossible! How could you think of him?"

"Because he is a quare little fellow; but somehow he seems to have known my lord your father, and to have loved him well. This he tells me secretly—for he is vastly polite—and has once and again invited me to take a dish of tea in his private sitting-room, which has as fine a plenishing as would make poor dear Madame Wandesforde's empty salon look like a palace was it there; and—but I'll tell

you by-and-by. Dear heart ! we must to my lady at once. I almost fear to stir."

"Dorothy," said her mistress, starting to her feet and speaking with an air of authority marvellous in one so young, "did I not say no word of this was to be breathed to mortal ? This gentleman means me well. See, he says the marriage shall not hamper me. He, it seems to me, seeks only to save me from John Langley. Ah ! there lies my real danger. I cannot tell why it is, Dorothy, but I *do* trust this gentleman. There was something in his look, dimly as I perceived it, that reminded me of my father."

"Ah ! my darlin', what witchcraft is this. Trust me, he only wants to secure the heiress of Langdale, for you *are* the heiress, from what Master Chifferil says, I'm sure."

"There is perhaps some truth in the tale," said Maud thoughtfully.

"Ay, is there ! so come—come to my lady at once ; she is not gone out yet—she will circumvent the biggest blackguard amongst them."

"No, Dorothy ! nothing will tempt me to disobey the injunction of this letter, and I

will send you from me and never see your face again if you dare—if you are so base as to betray what I have confided to you. Do not make me miserable, Dorothy.”

“Well, well! there! Sure I wouldn’t vex you for my life, but if mischief comes of it won’t I be massacred with abuse.”

“But no harm can come—I do not want really to marry this gentleman.” Maud laughed and blushed. “It does not seem he wants to marry me. I only want to keep free and quiet till something which this gentleman evidently looks to as likely to be a deliverance occurs. Meantime I may win upon my aunt, and at any rate she will not for very shame send me back to John Langley.”

“I suppose so—I suppose so,” said Dorothy dejectedly; “anyhow you must don your cloak, for if my lady says we are to go out, out we must go.”

“Dorothy,” asked Maud thoughtfully, “why do you think Master Chifferil believes that I am Baroness Langdale?”

“Core of my heart,” cried the waiting-woman, with much glee, “he has of his own



free will given me six gold pieces, to be repaid when you receive the rents of Langdale. He says he lends them for love of my lord ! but I am sure if his love is great, his belief must be a deal greater, or he would never trust me. Now there is *my* secret. If I have money, that's for us both ; and my heart has been as light as a cricket since I felt there wasn't room for the devil to dance in my pocket."

"I doubt if you should take this, Dorothy?"

"Ah, honeybird ! you keep your secret and I'll keep mine. When you come into your own you'll pay him back with interest."

"Indeed will I, dear good nurse ; and this gentleman too. If he is, as you say, a needy adventurer, may I not reward him for his services and send him away. Strange to speak thus of my 'husband.'"

"Your husband ! never name him so. Faith he will not readily let you go."

Having carefully burned the billet of her unknown bridegroom, Maud, though still trembling with the fear and excitement it had caused, completed her outdoor costume, and

sent to inquire if Lady Helmsford wished to see her before she set forth.

Her ladyship, however, had already gone out in her chair to attend the Princess of Wales's morning reception, for to her court in Leicester House all of beauty and fashion then attached themselves. Mistress Letitia Sparrow was the bearer of this intelligence, and presented herself also in outdoor garb.

"My Lady Helmsford," she said, with her usual smiling politeness, "had imposed upon her the agreeable task of accompanying the charming Mistress Langley in her proposed promenade, and she could take her woman or not as she thought fit. Master Chifferil would also escort them, and two of her ladyship's footmen follow after."

"In truth we shall be a small army," said Maud, laughing, but feeling the charm of the excursion gone when it necessitated so cumbersome an array. "Surely my good aunt is over careful."

"Such is her will," returned Mistress Letitia, "let us descend."

In the hall they found Chifferil, his large wig even more carefully curled and powdered

than usual ; also the attendant lackeys, armed with long staffs ; and over the large fire which warmed the entrance cowered the little negro.

Chifferil, who was standing hat in hand beside the fire in front of a large chair, bowed when Maud stepped from the stairs on the pathway of crimson carpet laid across the grey-and-black marble pavement of the hall. The black boy grinned an acknowledgment. As the party passed him Chifferil uttered a little speech which he had composed for the occasion. "He was," he said, "deeply honoured by being permitted to form the escort of a noble young lady so justly dear to them all. It was not for him to intrude, he would therefore follow with the excellent Mistress Dorothy." So saying he stepped forward in a dignified manner, but, alas ! left his wig behind him, attached to the fender by a long piece of twine which had been ingeniously knotted to his *queue*.

Chifferil's long uneven pate, destitute of hair, stood confessed, and he himself marvelously altered by the loss of all the dignity which went with the wig, looked like a little, eager, wizened lunatic.

“Look now! if that isn’t his work may I never drink another dish of tay,” cried Dorothy indignantly, pointing to Gomez, who had suddenly assumed a look of preternatural gravity, and seizing the twine with both her strong hands she snapped it and replaced the wig on its owner’s head with an energetic sympathy that sent it over his eyes.

“You are an ill-conditioned ill-conducted ape,” said the little secretary, with solemn disapprobation. “I shall myself inform my lady of your misdemeanour.”

“It wasn’t me at all, Massa Chifferil,” cried the imp; “’twas Tom dere—see him laugh hard as ever he can!”

“You little lying rascal!” muttered the man. “Don’t believe him, Master Chifferil,” he continued aloud; “he did it himself.”

“If you see me why for no tell massa?” chuckled Gomez.

“You ought to have your little black soul flogged out of you,” cried the footman.

Gomez made a grimace at him.

“You should indeed be punished,” said Maud gravely. “But come, Mistress Sparrow, we shall lose the sunshine.”

It was like a draught of new life to Maud when she stepped into the open air, and, following the guidance of the companion, found herself in what was then, as now, the famous Mall of St. James's.

It was a lovely winter's day. Although the frost was severe, the absence of wind and a bright sun made the temperature agreeable. The branches of the trees, beautiful and jewelled by their sparkling vesture ; the hard smooth ground ; the clear exhilarating atmosphere—made exercise a delight ; and the newness of everything was a source of the keenest pleasure to Maud. It was not exactly the fashionable hour, still numbers of well-dressed persons were about. The large hats of the humbler women ; the rich sacques and lace-trimmed hoods of the great ladies ; the liveries of the servants who attended them ; the varied aspect of the gentlemen in their wide-skirted coats, abundant lace, and braveries of all descriptions—all were strange to her. In France she had never seen anything grander than a state visit of some French noble to the rather decayed and melancholy Court of St. Germain ; and even that was amongst her

oldest memories. But the animation, the wealth and comfort which all the surroundings of the scene in which she found herself indicated, greatly surprised and interested her. She would have much preferred viewing it alone with Dorothy, but Mistress Sparrow was not without her uses ; she could explain and account for much which would have puzzled both herself and her faithful friend.

“ My lady strictly charged me not to venture amid yon crowd that gathers round the skaters on Rosamond’s pool—’tis there most of the folks are hurrying ; let us turn and walk up towards the old Mulberry Gardens, where his Grace of Buckingham’s new house stands.”

“ As you will,” said Maud ; “ ’tis all delightful to me.”

“ But you have surely seen Versailles and the Tuileries ? and we have nothing so fine here,” returned Mistress Sparrow.

“ I have seen the Tuileries—not Versailles ; but there do not seem to be nearly so many peoplenor such rich attire in France. Then, dear Mistress Sparrow, I lived ever in the old Château Chanlaire, and saw nothing.”

“Yet you wish to return. Well, I do not wonder at it ; for as I was once on the point of telling you—”

Whereupon Mistress Sparrow plunged into a history of her early attachment to a French cavalier who had been killed while fighting for somebody somewhere. The party had nearly reached Buckingham House when her attention was attracted by some passing celebrity, and, turning to look after him, she exclaimed, in alarm :

“Master Chifferil, those men have disappeared ; I can see no sign of them.”

The missing attendants had in fact slipped away to have a peep at the skating, and, for the moment, were nowhere to be seen.

“I shall go in search of the careless fellows,” exclaimed the secretary, making as if to turn back.

“Oh, gracious powers, no, good Master Chifferil,” cried Mistress Sparrow. “What, leave us three women alone ! and see there is a most suspicious-looking desperado lounging along by the rails near the water. We will all turn together, and see if we cannot meet them.”

The suspicious individual pointed out was a tall, gaunt, soldiery-looking man in a rusty red suit and a smart feathered hat.

"Ahem! I see nought objectionable in yon fellow," said Chifferil, recognising him; "but we will turn as you propose, if Mistress Langley so pleases."

Maud was ready to walk in any direction.

"How does this please you, Dorothy?" she asked.

"Oh right well, madam; 'tis a grand place. I should not mind if you had a house of your own close by. 'Tis ever so much gayer than all I have ever seen before."

The upper part of the Mall was less-crowded than where they had entered upon it; and as they retraced their steps they observed a gentleman advancing to meet them—a gentleman in a black suit laced with gold, a broad sword belt over the right shoulder, and a real fighting sword depending therefrom; high boots and a hat gold laced and fringed with feathers completed his costume.

"Sure," exclaimed Mistress Sparrow in some perturbation, "'tis no other than the Don himself—now this is unfortunate."



It was Don Juan di Monteiro who came straight towards them, and, raising his hat with courtly grace, greeted Maud and her companions.

“Where is the beautiful Countess?” he asked, after they had exchanged ceremonious salutations.

“My aunt has gone to attend the Princess’s reception.”

“Where, sir, I understood you were to be presented,” simpered Letitia.

“There was a talk of it,” said Monteiro carelessly, “but I have been warned to steer clear of Leicester House if I expect favour at St. James’s. If you are going down the Park permit me to join you. You have but a slender escort considering the value of the convoy.”

So saying, and while listening politely to Mistress Sparrow’s elaborate explanation of the footmen’s disappearance, Monteiro managed to place himself between Maud and the *dame de compagnie*.

“’Tis a gay scene, Mademoiselle, and better than being mewed up in Great Queen Street,” he said, looking at her with eyes half closed so as to veil their expression. “Madame la

Comtesse has told me of your escape ; am I indiscreet in referring to it ?”

“ O no,” replied Maud, with a bright smile ; “ every one knows everything concerning me—at least nearly everything. My life has hitherto been so simple, I feel amazed to find anything like difficulty or danger in it.”

“ Your life ought to be pure and fair, like yourself,” said the Spaniard, with a slight sigh. “ I must say I marvel that your kinsman—I mean the young one—is not man enough to take sides with you against his father, though I confess ’twould be no small exercise of virtue.”

“ You are too partial, sir ; but Captain Langley would be less bitter against me were it not for his father. I fear me I forget my aunt’s directions. Let us talk of something else.”

“ I was the original transgressor,” said the Don, smiling with a peculiarly soft caressing expression. “ So pardon me.”

Here Mistress Sparrow, who did not at all like being left out of the conversation, exclaimed, “ Don’t you find this climate somewhat biting, Monsieur, after the more sunny regions of Spain ?”

"I have never resided very long in Spain," he returned, "though I have frequently visited the country; but *I* find the climate of England more invigorating than chilling."

"Is it not unusual for a foreigner to like this land so well?" asked Maud.

"I do not call myself a foreigner exactly," replied Monteiro in French; "and I am envious of the name of Englishman."

"I too fancied I loved England much till I came here," answered Maud. "Now I greatly long to return to my old home in France—if it still exists—for I have never had any tidings since I left, nor have I been permitted to write."

"That was cruel," returned Monteiro, "particularly to those you left behind. Tell me what charm had your life in France that you remember it so fondly?"

"The charm of home and safety, which I have never known since. Ah! Monsieur de Monteiro, I was absolutely sinful in my longings for change—in my weariness of the peaceful quiet in that old château. I lived with such a kind grave lady, who was never angry and never hurried. I had books and

work and endless occupation ; and a great wide garden where I could roam at will, without all this wearisome following," waving her hand towards Mistress Sparrow, then scolding the two footmen, who had reappeared ; " and dear little children to play with, belonging to a widowed French lady who lived in the rooms over us. Then my dear father used to come at times like sunshine, and I had Dorothy ; and I was so free ! Now I have desolation."

To pour out her heart in French was too great a temptation. The grave sympathy and absorbed attention of her listener led her on. She could not, and did not try to account for her readiness to confide so readily in this stranger. But the simplicity and earnestness of his speech and manner, contrasted with the flowery affectations of all the other men who surrounded her aunt, drew her to him unconsciously but powerfully.

" Yet," returned Monteiro, " it was a homely house for Lord Langdale's daughter."

" How sweet was the homeliness," exclaimed Maud. " Ah, sir, you are a dear friend of my aunt ; she would no doubt grant

much to you. Intercede for me ! pray her to send me back to France. I want to live my own life—not to be a shuttlecock between contending players whose game I cannot understand.”

Poor Maud thought she had made a happy hit in thus endeavouring to secure the interest of Lady Helmsford’s favourite.

“Sweet Mistress Langley,” returned Monteiro, with much seriousness, and in English, “you are under a mistake ; the Countess of Helmsford was gracious enough to notice me in Paris because she likes novelty. She is hospitable to me here because she is courteous to strangers, but I am no more to her than she is to me. I dare not presume to intrude myself in her councils, or offer even an opinion on her affairs, otherwise I should in this, as in all things, be at your service.”

Maud’s large blue eyes turned on him with a look of bewildered surprise. Of all those she had met since parting with her beloved protectress, none had seemed to her so deserving of belief as this mysterious Spaniard who always spoke to her with a grave respect, different from the jovial ease of his manner

to others. And yet how could she doubt the evidence of her own eyes—the meaning of Mistress Sparrow’s innuendoes? She had begun to think that, in spite of some disparity of years, the Countess intended to marry Monteiro; and now he seriously disclaimed any title to interest or influence with her. It was more than she could understand.

“I must believe you, I suppose,” she said slowly.

“You may; I speak truth,” returned the Don impressively.

“My dear young lady,” exclaimed Mistress Sparrow, who had returned from catechising the footmen, “do you not think you have prolonged your promenade sufficiently?”

“No, indeed, good Mistress Sparrow,” said Maud. “Think how long I have been a prisoner! one more turn I pray you—so far as yonder mansion.”

“You must not deny Mistress Langley’s request,” observed Monteiro, “nor to me the honour of accompanying you.”

“Indeed, sir,” said Mistress Letitia, with a curtsy and a simper, “I am not so hard-hearted; but, in return, may I pray you to

speak English. I am not now so familiar with the French tongue as, alas ! I once was ; and besides, a gallant gentleman will understand how great a charge the guardianship of a young lady like Mistress Langley must be ; therefore—”

“You would like to hear all that is addressed to her by those fortunate cavaliers to whom she deigns to speak,” put in Monteiro, laughing as she hesitated. “ ’Tis but natural, so we will e’en grant each other’s petition.”

The remainder of the promenade was very agreeable, despite Maud’s doubts. Don Juan talked well and freely of travelling and the wonders of distant lands, of which he appeared to have seen much ; Mistress Sparrow frequently interrupting with notes of interrogation and admiration, while Maud from time to time made observations in her soft low tones, which always seemed to charm Monteiro, and incite him to fuller and warmer descriptions.

At length they separated, Monteiro accompanying them to the entrance of St. James’s Square and then returning to the Park, where, for some time, he walked to and fro in

one of the more secluded parts—rapidly—restlessly.

This pale fair girl was indeed the victim of a cruel fate ! Almost all the women he had known and toyed with, and fancied and forgotten, were at the best but goodnatured or easy tempered ; while the most of them were too whimsical to permit of much reliance, either on their goodnature or their easy temper ; and all would have found in rank—a brilliant equipage, jewels, finery—a consolation for most sentimental grievances. Here, however, was metal, not only more attractive, but purer, finer, and of a truer ring. No vulgar show, no commonplace passion, could satisfy Maud Langley's soul or win her. No ; the success of John Langley's schemes meant worse than death to her—a life-long agony, *if* she lived.

“How sweet and fair and noble she is,” thought the fiery Spaniard as he walked along near the water where the merry monarch was wont to feed his feathered favourites.

“God ! what a difference between her life and mine. And yet—and yet she inclines to trust me, to seek my help. Ay, she shall



have it. Before that accursed hound destroys her life I'll take his and his son's too ; it would be a simple act of duty. And she yearns for that gloomy shattered home in France, when scarce any cage could be lovely enough for so beauteous a bird. Yes, I will go to old Pantaloon's gathering. She asked me at parting why I refused Lord Chedworth's entertainment. I will go. If she will but trust me, if I can but prove—"

"How long is your Excellency going to walk the deck there this chill evening?" asked the tall man with the crimson suit whose doubtful seeming had alarmed Mistress Sparrow.

He had for some time been watching Monteiro's rapid pacing to and fro, and now approached him.

"Begone !" was the courteous reply. "Do not intrude yourself on my meditations."

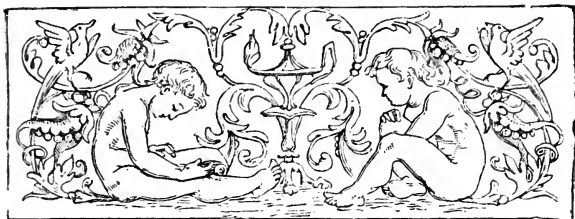
"All right, my noble Captain, but the shades of night are beginning to gather, and this is not too safe a place they say when day is done."

"Well, well, I'll away," said Monteiro, rousing himself; "I cannot afford to come to harm yet, D'Arcy ; I have work to do. Come,

my brave old comrade, let's be careful of our precious skins for the next few weeks. After that, perhaps adieu to old England for ever!"

"What, after striving so hard to come here and turn Englishman?" cried D'Arcy.

"It is impossible to say what side of the dice fortune may turn up; meantime let's get into Pall Mall, find a coach, and drive to Lamb's. I needs must see Robilliard."



## CHAPTER XI.

**T**HE Countess of Helmsford had already returned from the royal reception when Maud and her escort reached home. She was, they were informed, somewhat indisposed, and desired that Mistress Sparrow should be sent to her immediately on her entrance. Something in poor Letitia's expression, on the receipt of this command, suggested to Maud that her anticipations were not agreeable.

"I must not suppress the fact that our distinguished acquaintance, Don Juan di Monteiro, joined us in the Park," she whispered before obeying the summons.

"Wherefore should you?" asked Maud in

some surprise. "I am surely permitted to converse with those to whom my aunt introduces me."

"No doubt, no doubt," whispered Letitia hastily; "but 'tis as well we tell the same tale;" and she ran quickly upstairs.

Maud looked after her, with an unpleasant astonishment, and, mounting to her own apartments, laid aside her walking dress, and, in spite of the agitation which she had suffered in the morning, enjoyed the slight feeling of fatigue which her unusual exercise produced, also the variety of talking over what they had seen with Dorothy.

But more than this did the young orphan like the hour of quiet which followed their dinner, which was served soon after their return (for Maud had never yet dined, save by invitation, with Lady Helmsford).

Good Dorothy was wont to retire after dinner to the inner chamber—to read, she said, the evening prayers, which she preferred to do in private, but Maud shrewdly suspected that her devotions were paid to the soothing god of sleep.

Then alone, in the gathering twilight, by

the red glow of the fire, did Maud Langley brood over the letter she had that day so mysteriously received. With all her thoughts turned inward, she recalled the vivid yet confused memories of the wedding-day at Langdale. Who could the bridegroom be? When should she see him? What would he be like? He was a friend—of that she felt sure, because he was an enemy of the Langleys. Half unconsciously to herself, she had grown to look upon her unknown husband as a deliverer, but when would he show himself? Would he prove to be some high-minded gentleman whom she could indeed love and look up to and pass her life with? How she wished he might be such a one. The interest of these speculations nearly banished from her mind the sort of painful surprise with which she had listened to Monteiro's solemn declaration that he was no more than a common acquaintance to Lady Helmsford, and also a strange feeling, half attraction, half distrust, that always affected her when she met his eyes. She liked him and she did not, but such doubts vanished before the absorbing interest that hung round her hus-

band. "Her husband!" the very word was enough to raise a hundred contradictory emotions in a young girl's heart, chief of which was an intense longing that he might be good and kind, and that with him she might find real protection.

"Alone and in the dark!" said Lady Helmsford's voice close to her. The Countess had entered softly and unperceived, having paused for a few moments to mark how deeply her niece was wrapped in thought.

"My aunt! I did not hear you," cried Maud, starting up, her heart beating fast at this sudden recall to reality.

"No! indeed! Now I wonder where your thoughts were? But of course you will not tell me."

Maud blushed and was silent for a moment; and then, with the generous hope of winning her aunt's confidence and liking, exclaimed:

"Yes, madam, I will, even if you disapprove, for you must own it is but natural that I should often think of that—that strange marriage and the gentleman who took Harold's place."

"Indeed!" returned Lady Helmsford in a

peculiar tone. "Why do you always speak of that adventurer as 'a gentleman'? He most probably was some robber or smuggler (they say the coast near Langdale is infested with such), bribed to spite your guardian. It was scarce the act of a gentleman."

"And yet he is, dear aunt. I cannot say why I feel it, but he *is* a gentleman."

"We need not argue the matter," returned the Countess carelessly. "I have something of importance to speak of. Ring for lights."

Maud obeyed, and Lady Helmsford threw herself into a deep lounging chair with an air of weariness, preserving an unbroken silence till her order was obeyed, and Maud then perceived that she did indeed look ill. Her rouge had not been as yet laid on for the evening toilette; her hair was coiled into a knot, and she was in real comfortable dishabille, still no dress could alter the fact that she was a handsome woman. It was the haggard distressed look of her eyes that struck Maud with surprise and pity.

"You are ill—you have been suffering," she exclaimed tenderly, venturing to take

her aunt's hand. "Why did you not send for me?"

Lady Helmsford's dark eyes looked eagerly—almost fiercely—into Maud's, as if she would fain have read the very secrets of her heart; then she smiled more softly and kindly than usual.

"You are like your mother, Maud," she said dreamily. "You ought to have been born in a different station. You are a home-bird, scarce fit to fill a great lady's part. You have neither the spirit, nor the wit, nor the hardness it requires."

"I am not ambitious, my aunt," returned Maud, drawing herself up with a haughty look and gesture that became her well; "but I trust God will give me grace to do my duty in whatever station of life He sees fit to allot me."

"Well, child," resumed Lady Helmsford, "it is of that station I have come to speak with you. Your position is doubtful, dangerous, unbecoming. As yet I think the gossips have not had scent of the delicious morsel this Langdale marriage would be to them. When they do, you will not have a



rag of reputation left ; the sooner this obstacle to your settlement in life is swept away and you are protected by a noble and honourable alliance the better. I do not wish to put any force on your inclinations, nor do I see any advantage in a marriage with the left-hand line of your family, so the sooner you wed some powerful personage the sooner you will be safe from your uncle. Whether he likes it or not, I shall at once take steps to set you free. I have seen my lawyer to-day respecting the necessary measures. No time must be lost."

"But, madam—dear aunt," cried Maud, who had listened to this speech with a varying colour and beating heart, "I am already guarded from John Langley. He dare not take me from you ; he cannot force me to go through the marriage ceremony again with his son. Trying and doubtful as my condition is, I would rather bear it awhile and see if this gentleman—my husband, as I must call him—will not reappear as he promised, and set me free."

The Countess drew Maud to her, gently pressing her shoulder till the girl slowly bent her knee beside her.

"Foolish child! you do not dream the daring wickedness of which avaricious and resolute men are capable. Tell me, what do you remember of this man?" And the Countess looked searchingly into her face while she answered:

"In truth scarce anything, save that his eyes had a kindly look that somehow vaguely reminded me of my father."

"Your father! he was a thorough Englishman: fair, florid, grey-eyed. What more? What did he say?"

"Only in a sort of deep whisper, 'Keep faith with me, till I can claim you or release you.'"

"And his voice—was it that of a gentleman?"

"I could not say what it sounded like. I seemed to gather the sense of the words without almost hearing the sound."

"This is the strangest part of all—the impression he seems to have left upon you. Maud, are you weak and fanciful enough to imagine you love this dim ghost of a husband?"

"I cannot tell, madam," returned Maud, blushing deeply even while she spoke calmly

and candidly. "If he proves a worthy gentleman—anxious to do me a service for my father's sake—why should I not?"

"And if he turns out a rude swashbuckler, you will find it troublesome and costly to quit you of him."

"Such a one will not seek a portionless demoiselle."

"Ay; but trust me, this man is some adventurer who knows you are the heiress of Langdale. Nay more, he probably holds the pardon, and only waits some fitting opportunity to seize you and the estate also. No, Maud; on Monday my lawyer shall open the preliminaries of a suit in the Ecclesiastical Court."

"So far as the lack of my consent will go to hinder the proceedings, count upon it, madam," returned Maud, with much spirit, and raising her large blue eyes fearlessly to an encounter with her aunt's black ones.

After an instant's silence Lady Helmsford relaxed into an amused smile.

"I think, young lady, I was over quick to decide on your want of spirit. Then you have seen none in all the fair company which

gathers round me to drive this dream of yours out of your mind?" and the Countess looked keenly at her.

"None, madam," replied Maud simply, meeting the look with the calmness of truth.

"And this man has never attempted to communicate with you? But no, in *my* household nothing occurs without my knowledge. You are quite sure, Maud, that *no* one has disturbed this fancy of yours," still gazing at her.

"No, madam—in truth none," said Maud, infinitely relieved to find her aunt did not press the first question.

"It is well," observed the Countess, with a slight sigh. "Be watchful, child, of your heart or fancy, or whatever plays us weak women such vile tricks. All our sorrows, all our failures, come from what moralists, like my pleasant breakfast companions, the 'Spectator' and 'Tatler,' term our 'nobler parts.' Look at the enormous power a woman wields over a man she does *not* love, and who loves her! Once give *him* the mastery and you have lost your compass—chaos is come again; you can no longer rule your life; you sink into

a degrading slavery from which nothing can release you, save, perhaps, change."

"Yet, madam, when he whom you love loves and respects you in return, life must be very sweet," said Maud, smiling.

"The dream of a novice! Men never value or respect that which they have absolutely won."

"Ah, do not say so," exclaimed the novice imploringly.

"Yes, so it is. Child, there is something about you I could almost love; be guided by me and I will place you well. Rank and riches are substantial joys; and many a pleasant morsel of forbidden fruit can be hidden away among their ample draperies."

"Love me then, dear aunt! do love me! I only ask to be allowed to love you;" and Maud kissed her hand.

Lady Helmsford smiled, but withdrew it coldly, as if a little ashamed of her previous softness.

"Sit by me," she said, "I have yet a word or two which will prove my care for you, before I go to dress for the everlasting round from which I cannot escape. That Spanish

gentleman, who joined you in the Park to-day—be sparing of your notice to him. He is—well—he is scarce sober enough to be a young lady's cavalier. He led a wild life in Paris. They say he carried off a nun, and fought and gambled and drank hard, and much else unfit for your ears."

"Indeed, madam; I grieve to hear it," cried Maud with candour, though colouring brightly. "He seemed to me a grave and kindly gentleman. But might not the unhappy nun have been secluded against her will, and his but an act of chivalry to restore her to her friends," added the fair advocate, her Protestant prejudices coming to her aid.

The Countess laughed contemptuously.

"In truth yours is a lively fancy, Mistress Langley, indulge it as you will; but heed my warning, as few words as civility warrants with Don Juan di Monteiro," concluded Lady Helmsford in her most imperious manner.

"Of course, dear aunt, your word in most things is my law; only I marvel you permit this gentleman the entree of your house."

"That is my affair; I can meddle with much you ought not to handle. I may be of

use to the young man, and lead him into better courses ; 'tis enough for you to obey."

The Countess spoke angrily, and rose as she spoke.

"It is," said Maud simply.

"I wish you good-evening then," said Lady Helmsford. "To-morrow you must choose your dress for Lord Chedworth's party. While under my protection you must look worthy of it."

And her ladyship swept away with very little show of the love she had half promised.

"Dorothy, are you there, Dorothy?" said Maud, opening the door into her bed-chamber; whereupon the excellent woman nearly fell forward on her face.

"Ah, my bird, to be sure I am, and heard every word. She is a great lady entirely, and knows a power about the men. I declare she means well by you. Now don't be speaking a word to that dark devil of a Spaniard; don't ye see my lady wants to guide him in the right road all by herself, and you are not to have a finger in it—mind that now!"

"Dorothy, how can you talk thus? Do you think I care to speak with Monsieur di

Monteiro? certainly not. It will be painful to me to exchange a word with him after all these *pourparlers*."

"Well, well, don't pain yourself; and now I'll just go and see if there is any signs of a dish of tea—for I'm that thirsty!"

A few days after this conversation, which gave Maud ample food for thought, business was at its full tide—in those days never very full compared to the high-water mark attained in these later times—in the various departments of his Majesty's Treasury. It was past noon; a dull drizzle had replaced the bright clear frost of the week before. But weather did not much affect the visitors whose business lay with the officials employed in that solid unpretending edifice. Seekers for favours, drivers of hard bargains, men with saleable morsels of intelligence and hints of foreign politics came whether it rained or shone; among them, in his own chair—for he avoided the pretension implied by an equipage—came John Langley. He was evidently known, for a porter at once threw open an inner door and ushered him into a large room



where several clerks sat writing at fixed desks. Mr. Langley walked to the upper end, where a grave elderly man, evidently the head of the department, had a chair and desk all to himself by the fire.

“Good-morning, Mr. Langley,” said the gentleman, rising. “Can I do any for you, sir?”

“I thank you, sir; I am here to see my Lord Sunderland on the part of Lord Berkeley.”

“I shall let him know directly,” returned the other. “At present Mr. Aislalie is with my lord. ’Tis a—unpleasant weather. Will you look at the paper, Mr. Langley?”

Mr. Langley accepted it, more to avoid conversation than to seek news. Soon the sound of closing doors induced one of the clerks to look through a square of glass at the end of the room

“Mr. Aislalie’s going out, sir,” said the young man.

“Oh, very well. Jenkins, go up and say Mr. Langley of the Admiralty waits on his lordship. By appointment, sir?” to Langley.

“By appointment.”

In a few minutes the messenger returned and asked Langley to follow him upstairs. Passing through the ante-chamber with a slight civil bow to a secretary who was hard at work amid a mass of papers, Langley was ushered into the great man's presence.

In a large, square, comfortably but by no means luxuriously furnished room, and with his back to the fire, stood Lord Sunderland. A tall handsome man of stately presence, richly dressed in crimson velvet embroidered with gold, and looking graciously down on the plain dark figure which entered out of a magnificent curled periwig. John Langley bowed low, but not too low ; with all his faults he possessed a backbone, and to that quality much of his success was due.

“Well, sir, you bring me a note from my Lord Berkeley?”

“I do, my lord ; and I am to supplement the information it contains by answering any questions you wish to put.”

Lord Sunderland hastily read the letter, and then, seating himself at his writing-table, across which lay his rapier, which he appeared

to have laid aside for greater ease, reperused the paper more carefully, and, drawing to him pen and paper, said :

“Sit down, my good sir ; a little talk will make this clearer,” at once plunged into details respecting the Admiralty and the estimates for the navy, with the jobbing which thereunto, as a matter of course, appertained, that would make the ears of the least democratic and reforming of modern members tingle, and his hair stand on end.

After more than half an hour thus occupied, Lord Sunderland rose and resumed his former position on the hearthrug.

“I am obliged to you, sir,” he said after a few minutes’ silence. “You have made these matters plain. I congratulate my Lord Berkeley on the qualities of his secretary.”

Another pause, during which Langley also rose and bowed, but kept his position beside the writing-table. The silence continuing, Langley broke it by observing :

“Lord Berkeley was good enough to promise his intercession with your lordship for a few moments of your valuable time on a personal topic.”

“He *has* asked me to hear you, sir,” returned the Minister. “Speak on,” glancing at the clock as he said it.

“Your lordship is probably aware that I am commissioned to manage the estate of the late Lord Langdale, who was attainted and fled the country some eight or nine years ago.”

“Yes, now you mention it I remember,” said Lord Sunderland.

“I find a belief exists among some friends of the family that her late Majesty—influenced no doubt by my Lord Bolingbroke—granted a pardon or reversal of the attainder very shortly before her death, but I have in vain made inquiry for it—it has disappeared if it ever existed.”

“Somewhat unusual, Mr. Langley.”

“Yes, my lord ; but things were confused on the arrival of his Majesty, and the reins of government were in hands less firm and clean than at present.”

Lord Sunderland smiled slightly. “Well, sir ?”

“Lord Langdale bequeathed his only child, an orphan daughter, to my guardianship, I

presume as a provision for the poor young lady, who is left penniless. She is now under my care. I have also, my lord, a son—now a captain in his Majesty's Guards—and if it be permitted to a parent so to say, a promising young officer. He wishes to wed his cousin, nor would I willingly oppose his choice. My object, therefore, in troubling your lordship is to ascertain what chance there is of the disabilities affecting young Mistress Langley's rights being removed, even if the pardon supposed to have been granted by the late queen is irretrievably lost."

"I understand," returned the Minister. "You wish to secure the Langdale property for your son—it is but natural."

"It is an ungracious task to urge one's own deserts," resumed Langley in his strong, harsh, inflexible voice, which sounded like a species of guarantee for his honesty by its very unpleasantness, "but I must venture to remind your lordship that I was lucky enough to be able to prove my own loyalty, and to do the country some service, owing to my fortunate presence on the south coast, when an attempt was made by some ill-dis-

posed persons to land and foment disturbance, near Rye, about two years ago, when—”

“Yes, yes—I remember it.”

“Mr. Walpole, your lordship’s predecessor, was good enough to thank me personally ; and I need not say that the House of Hanover would have in myself and my son devoted adherents.”

“Not a bad substitute for the original stock—though if I remember aright the late Lord Langdale was by no means a bitter Jacobite. Foolish fellows these men, who lose their all for so worthless a cause. Well, Mr. Langley, I am not averse to your request ; but I must inquire into this question of the missing pardon. I have heard something germane to the matter lately, which, in the press of business, has escaped my notice ; your speech has recalled it. I will make inquiries. Believe me I shall be happy if it is any way within my power to befriend so loyal a servant of the crown ;” and the Minister bowed as if the audience was ended.

But John Langley was not to be got rid of so easily. “Your lordship must excuse me, this succession to the Langdale estates is a

matter I have much at heart. What may be the nature of the information which has reached you respecting them?"

"Odds my life!" cried Lord Sunderland impatiently, "I cannot tell—I know something has been writ me, but nothing much or I should remember. Of this, however, assure yourself, that I am on your side; for it seems to me a fair and honourable settlement that your son, who, but for a slight difficulty," said the great man pleasantly, "would be heir of Langdale, and the fair lady (I suppose she is fair?), who, but for another difficulty, would be heiress, should unite their difficulties and achieve successful possession. I shall have instant inquiry made and lay the matter before the King in one shape or another. His Majesty returns in four or five weeks. I imagine Mr. Secretary Craggs waits below."

Even John Langley was obliged to make his bow and his exit on this. "In four or five weeks," he muttered to himself as he descended the stair. "She must be Harold's wife before that time. The favour leans to Lord Langdale's daughter, Jacobite and rebel though he was; these nobles cling to each

other marvellously—still they shall one day open their ranks to receive my son.”

Re-entering his chair, Mr. Langley was carried over the short space intervening between the Treasury and Wallingford House, and, after a brief interview with the First Lord of the Admiralty, proceeded to his own residence.

His first inquiry was for his son, but Captain Langley had not called that morning.

“Lay another cover at dinner, and, Mathews,” to the single man-servant who attended to him indoors, “fetch me a light. I will see if there are a few bottles of Burgundy left in the cellar. Captain Langley is accustomed to fine wines in the great houses where he is entertained. He must not lack them when he dines at home.”

More than an hour elapsed before the expected guest appeared; but John Langley had sufficient employment in re-reading sundry letters; looking over accounts, and making calculations, to prevent it seeming long.

His usual dinner-hour was past, however,



when Harold arrived, driving up in a hackney-coach.

“Late as usual, Harold,” said his father, as he sauntered in, his pale face, languid air, and depressed expression presenting an unpromising aspect for the discussion his father had planned.

“I am sorry, sir, but it is really unavoidable.” Throwing his hat on the sideboard, he sat down by the fire, and stretching out his legs, thrust his hands into his breeches pockets, looking a picture of weariness and disgust.

“I fear, Harold, that all is not well with you. Have you been losing at play?”

“No, sir, the cockpit this time; that fellow, Sir Eustace Blount, has the devil’s own luck. The bird I backed was within an ace of winning, when—” he rushed into a description of the fortunes of the fight, which would no doubt be as uninteresting to my reader as to his listener, and a good deal more unintelligible.

“And the upshot of all this, Harold, is, I suppose, that you have lost a round sum?”

“I confess I have been hit.”

“Hit hard, Harold? what will cover it—two figures?”

“No,” returned the prodigal shamelessly; “it is a hundred and seventy this time.”

John Langley continued to fold and arrange his papers with an unmoved face.

“Listen to me, Harold,” he said quietly, but with a cold decision in his tone that woke up the young *roué* very effectually. “I have taken my resolution. I shall pay this money for you as I have done before; but take warning, hitherto I have had no object in life save yourself. I am willing to run some risk to give you a great position; if you are capable of exerting some self-control—of choosing between idiotic pleasures and substantial advancement—prove it now. If not, I shall make the wrench at once, and renounce you. I am young enough to make new ties, and could choose a partner in a higher grade of life than your mother, Harold, though she came of a good City stock. Now do not let us drift into an unpleasant tone of conversation. Your future is in your hands. No words—no protestations, Harold. I mean

what I say, show me that you mean obedience."

He rose and rang.

"Dinner immediately," said Mr. Langley. Then, with a change of voice and manner, he added, "I have not done a bad day's work, nor a bad week's work since I saw you, Harold. It is nigh a week since you supped with me, is it not?"

"Eight days, sir," returned Harold, considerably struck by his father's speech and manner. "Then you had accomplished but little."

"Well, the report after dinner."

This was soon announced, and the operation of eating it considerably invigorated Harold, who cheered up sufficiently to repeat some of the gossip and smart sayings of the coffee-house and the green-room, detailing the great mansions where he had been received, and the great ladies by whom he had been graciously noticed. "And to-night," he wound up, "I am to accompany my Lady Helmsford and dainty Mistress Langley to a select drum at my Lord Chedworth's—only a few particular stars of the highest fashion are invited."

"I thought the drum was a woman's entertainment," said John Langley, watching impatiently the removing of the dishes and the approach of the moment when he would be alone with his son.

"'Tis so in ordinary cases, my dear sir, but on this occasion it is a sort of *petit souper*, to permit my lady and her niece to examine his lordship's rare china and pictures."

"*Her* niece," quoth John Langley scornfully; "*my* niece you should say! There, Mathews, leave the wine beside Captain Langley, I prefer this claret—that will do—you need not wait. Fill your glass, Harold. You seldom tasted finer vintage. Now, my son, I will detail my doings since we met. I have this day spoken with Lord Sunderland—" and he proceeded to recapitulate his conversation in that interview.

"His lordship speaks fair," observed Harold; "but how about those queer customers in Lamb's Court? You had not succeeded in opening communications with them when I last saw you."

"I have since, and they are a dangerous lot to meddle with; still the chief among them

is not unknown to me. I think I can contrive to make him work with a rope round his neck. I have not given him a hint who I am. He thinks me an agent for some one considerably above myself. I only saw him the night before last at a somewhat villainous inn near Hatton Garden. He is cautious, and will not commit himself as to the amount of knowledge he possesses respecting the marriage. I do not believe he was the impostor himself, but rather his *employé*; and there is some scheme afoot for carrying off Maud—so much I can make out; also that this man is open to the highest bidder. I am making a few inquiries, and I rather think he will turn out to be a certain Morley (he now calls himself Strange) who a couple of years back was taken when endeavouring to break into a nobleman's house near Kensington—taken with all his tools—and had a fight in which he killed one of the watch and got away. If so, he is our bond-man."

"A creditable associate. Well, sir, what conclusion have you arrived at?"

"I have not absolutely concluded anything;

but the man is needy and in my grasp, and I shall conclude with him that he shall hire a carriage and horses, necessary ruffians, and all requisites to aid an ardent lover, name unknown, and hold them in readiness at a certain place appointed, to be forthcoming at any moment within the next fifteen days. Maud Langley must be your wife before the King returns, the rest is in your hands ; *I* must not appear. You know the going out and the coming in of the noble company amid which you live. Lay your plans ; I shall give you a sign by which Master Strange will know you—wear a mask, and for ten days or so the unknown bridegroom will have the credit of having carried off his bride ; you, meantime, will be absent on business. When you return the laugh will be on your side, and I shall be greatly displeased by such headstrong imprudence.”

“I think I understand the game, sir,” returned the son, “and am the more inclined to play it, for I can see Lady Helmsford, with all her smooth civility, does not intend to have me for her nephew-in-law ; and Mistress

Maud *endures* me," Harold concluded, with a bitter laugh.

"Then she shall have something more than she dreams of to endure," returned Langley, with an unpleasant look. "We will not allow our plans to be baffled by the sickly fancy of a girl who does not know what is good for her."

"I imagine it grows late," said Harold moodily, "and I have to dress for my Lord Chedworth's entertainment. Why will you not sometimes come out of your shell, sir, and view the great world?"

"The great world!" echoed Langley, with unutterable scorn; "the puppet world, the strings of which I, and men like me, pull—no; I don't wish to mix with fine ladies and macaronies; there is no place for me amongst them; yet they have their uses—they have their uses."

"Then to-morrow," said Harold, rising.

"To-morrow," answered his father, "I will finally arrange all particulars, and you must decide the moment of action."

"By the way, sir, have you discovered any-

thing respecting that confounded Don Juan di Monteiro?"

"No; I have forgotten him. He is nothing to us, let the Countess of Helmsford exalt him as she will."

END OF VOL. I.









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